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THE LEGENDS OF THE WAGNER DRAMA

STUDIES IN MYTHOLOGY AND ROMANCE

BY JESSIE L. WESTON

TRANSLATOR OF 'PARZIVAL' BY

WOLFRAM VON ESCHENBACH

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

In venturing to bring before the public another book dealing with the much-discussed subject of the Wagner Drama, the writer feels that some words of explanation as to the motives which have prompted the work are necessary. Regarding Wagner and his works so much has already been written and published, that it might well seem that the ground had already been fully occupied; and yet, in England at least, there is one branch of the subject which can hardly be said to have received the full attention which it undoubtedly deserves. The majority of Wagnerian works are concerned with the discussion, either of the musical construction of the dramas or of the ethical and philosophical problems with which they deal. Much has been written about Wagner's music, much about Wagner's teaching, but, so far, little has been published dealing with the relation of Wagner's work to the literary and legendary sources upon which it is founded.

And yet it is one of Wagner's great merits, one

of his inestimable claims upon our gratitude, that in his self-imposed task of creating a National Drama he turned back to seek his inspiration from his National Literature. By so doing he directed our attention, not merely to works the true literary value of which had been but imperfectly realised, but to legends in which not Germans alone, but the kindred Anglo-Saxon nations, might claim an hereditary right of possession.

Thus, of the great cycle of legends, based on well-known works of mediæval German literature, which forms the subject-matter of Wagner's music-dramas, two alone, the Nibelungen and the Tannhäuser legends, can be claimed as purely German; and of these, the hero of the first, Siegfried, is but the Teutonic development of an Aryan original, whose British parallel is to be found in Parsifal.

The legend of Tristan had in all probability its origin, certainly its development, on British ground; and in the mythical founder of the Anglo-Saxon race we find the earliest trace of the hero whom Wagner presents to us as the Swan-knight, Lohengrin. The heroes of the Wagner Drama are no strange creations of a foreign tongue and a foreign literature, but belong to us by hereditary right, and we ought surely to feel sufficient interest in the legends connected with

them to lead us to ask whether this nineteenth century version of their character and achievements is a fair, or unfair, representation of the traditional facts. Even if our motive be no other than the desire of estimating aright the work of one of the most remarkable men whom the world has ever seen, we ought, on that account, not to neglect the legends and the literature from which Wagner drew so freely; otherwise, we are as likely to underestimate his dramatic genius as, in all probability, to overestimate his creative power.

Impartial criticism will probably decide that Wagner owes more to mediæval literature than mediæval literature owes to Wagner; but the debt on either side is a heavy one, and the dust and smoke of controversy will need time to settle before we can fairly judge on which side the balance is heaviest. To the men who went before him Wagner owes not merely the outline of his plot, the story upon which his action is based, but also in many cases the very details of the action, the conception of his characters, and their relation to each other.

But the original stories present emphatically an *embarras de richesses*: they were too full, too complicated, for dramatic representation, and the skill with which Wagner selected those incidents which would 'tell' most effectively on the stage, re-combined them so as to preserve (in some

cases restore) the original simplicity of the story, developed the characters, and grasped with unerring instinct hints of his predecessors which, superfluous for the epic, were big with possibilities for the dramatic form, can never be properly appreciated without a clear knowledge of the material on which he worked.

We cannot and ought not to forget that behind the Wagner Drama lie such enduring monuments of literature as the *Volsunga-saga*, the *Nibelungen-lied*, the *Parzival* of Wolfram von Eschenbach, and the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg; but it is none the less true that, beyond the limits of their native lands, these works, especially the two last-mentioned, were but little known and little studied—in fact, for many years they were, even in their own home, practically forgotten. The Nibelungen-lied, as the national German Epic, held its own with fair success, even as our Arthurian legends never quite faded from the English mind; but till the revival of the Romantic school at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries the great bulk of mediæval literature was practically a dead letter.

But when Wagner began his life-work, editions of the mediæval masterpieces were rapidly issuing from the press, each editor endeavouring, by examination of the sources which unexpectedly

revealed themselves to careful research, to correct the faults of his predecessors. The material lay ready to his hand, and so he bade the long silent heroes awake from their slumber and once more speak their message to the world, while he stood as interpreter between us and them, and bade us, on our part, open our ears and hearken. But the message will fail of half its power if we forget that Wagner was an *interpreter*, and only where necessity arose a *creator*, and allow insight and interest alike to be limited to the comparatively narrow sphere wherein of necessity the dramatic action must move; if we content ourselves with the echo, without seeking to learn the song. We need to realise that the life of the Wagner Drama is the genius, not alone of the musician-dramatist, but of men whose work has already stood the test of centuries—a test which Wagner's own work has yet to face,—and turn back ourselves, even as he did, to that long-buried Hoard with whose riches those of the Nibelungs cannot compare. Assuredly, if we do so, we shall but add to the debt we already owe Richard Wagner; his work will be in no sense the loser, while we ourselves shall gain immeasurably.

It is with the hope of leading others to examine these legends for themselves that the following studies have been written.

The Nibelungen Ring

THE LEGEND

CHAPTER II

The original home of the Siegfried legend—Its historical development—Principal versions of the legend—The Volsunga-saga—The Thidrek-saga—The Nibelungen-lied.

Not the earliest among Wagner's music-dramas in its poetical conception, almost the latest in its perfected musical form, it is yet fitting that, in a study of the legends which lie at the basis of the series of immortal works which the genius of Richard Wagner has bequeathed to the world, we should place in the forefront the great Siegfried legend, the primæval heritage of the German people. For, in spite of the fascinating garb in which, through the darkness of the long Northern nights and sunless Northern days, the skill of Icelandic bards has clothed the story, the home of the legend was originally the home of the German Folk, the Rhine-land.

How old the legend is we cannot tell; we only know that it comes to us fraught with dim reminiscences and hints of a time when the worlds of sense and of spirit were not so far apart as now we hold them; when the gods, clad in the likeness

of men, walked the earth, and visibly turned and guided as they would the lives of mortals; a time when the sons of God beheld the daughters of men, and saw that they were fair. What wonder, then, if the threads of a web woven so long ago have become torn and tangled by time, if here and there we find rents in the fabric, and the original design baffles our scrutiny. But it is a goodly fabric still, and the colours are fair to look on, and the waving lines of the pattern enchain our fancy, even if we cannot tell where in old time they began, or how, in truth, they ended.

As we shall see later, the myth which took form and shape on German soil was originally, in part at least, brought by them from the common cradle of their race, the home of the Aryan people. How early it assumed its distinctive form we cannot now tell; but this we may look upon as certain, that, originally mythical, and dealing with the life and death of a mythical hero, it was well known and popular by the fifth century; and that shortly after that date it became modified by the introduction of an element distinctly historical, and based on the events of the latter half of that century. The causes which led to this amplification of the original legend are still a matter of speculation, but all are agreed that in the latter part of the Siegfried story, as it now stands, we have a reminiscence of the defeat and destruction

of the Burgundian kingdom by the Huns A.D. 437; and of the death of Attila, on the night of his marriage with Ildico, A.D. 453.

When we remember the terrifying effect produced by the incursions of Attila and his savage warriors, the dread with which they were regarded as instruments of Divine wrath rather than as mere men of predatory instincts, a dread which has been embodied in Attila's well-known title of 'The Scourge of God,' and the abrupt closing of his career by a death as sudden and mysterious as his life had been brilliant and awe-inspiring,—we can only find it natural that such a character should have become, not merely a striking historical personality, but a legendary hero; that he became, and that in so short a period after his death, an integral part of an already existing and immensely popular legend, is a more striking proof of the effect produced by Attila on the popular mind than any outside historical testimony can afford.

As remarked above, the causes which led to Attila's absorption into the legend are difficult to determine; we cannot securely base an argument on mere similarity of names—in the early records of all peoples, history and legend are so closely intertwined; but it is worthy of note that the roll of the Burgundian kings includes the names of Gibica, Gundohar, Godomar, and Gislahar—names

which accord too strongly with the varying forms found in the legend for the resemblance to be merely accidental, though at this distance of time it is impossible to say whether legend borrowed from history, or history filled up gaps in its roll by borrowing from legend. That the names accorded independently, and that there was originally a *legendary* Gunther, whose personality became merged in that of the *historical* Gunther, as some critics maintain, seems scarcely probable. It is most likely that the story in its simple and primæval form ended with Siegfried's death, and that as time went on the people became dissatisfied with a conclusion which in their eyes lacked justice; the treacherous murder of one so young, so brilliant, and beautiful as the hero is always represented, demanded vengeance—Attila's death, really due to natural causes, was by many ascribed to his wife, an act of vengeance on her part for the murder of her father by the Huns; her name, Ildico, recalled the Grimhild, or Hilda, of the legend; and to the introduction of this *Rache-motif* we very likely owe the development of the legend, and its blending of legendary and historical event—the vengeance worked out by a woman's unrelenting hatred, involving alike the murderers of Siegfried and the instrument of their punishment, Attila. The total destruction of the Burgundian power would naturally make a strong impression on the

neighbours of the vanquished people, and it is easy to understand how the (historically unimportant) father of Ildico became replaced in popular imagination by the Burgundian kings, whose overthrow might very well demand vengeance. If there really were, as in the case of Ildico, whom we know to be historical, a similarity between the names of the actors in the legendary and the historical drama, the temptation to weld the two into one would become irresistible; and though, of course, it is impossible to speak with certainty, the hypothesis that the moulding of the Siegfried legend into its final and completed form was due to these influences, is at least intelligible and worthy of consideration.

In any case, this union between legend and history took place soon after the death of Attila, for the story, in this form, travelled North probably not later than the sixth century. Here, among the Scandinavian peoples, it found a congenial home, and became enshrined in a number of songs or lays, some of which are preserved in the Icelandic Eddas to this day. Out of these songs, and others now lost, an unknown compiler, in the twelfth century, constructed the *Volsunga-saga*, a prose recital of the origin and deeds of the race of the Volsungs, of which race Sigurd is the last and greatest hero. The story has, of course, undergone considerable modification by transmission from its original

German home, and many of its special features are undoubtedly due to Northern influence, but it retains, far more strongly than the other versions, the mythical element undoubtedly present in the original story, and, on the whole, it may be considered as giving the oldest, as it certainly does the most complete and poetical, form of the legend. We also possess another Northern version, of somewhat later date, the *Thidrek-saga* (so called because its main object is the recital of the deeds of Thidrek of Bern), compiled probably by an Icelandic scribe in the middle of the thirteenth century; but inasmuch as the version given is based avowedly on German, and especially on Saxon, tradition, it represents the *German* rather than the *Scandinavian* form of the story. In this light, considering the fact that the legend is admittedly of German origin, the Thidrek-saga is especially valuable; and though, as a whole, the atmosphere of the story is more mediæval and less primitive than that of the Volsunga-saga, in certain details, which will be noted in their place, it seems to have preserved more faithfully the original form of the legend.

But even in its original German home the legend became in process of time much modified, as in the form of lays, sung or recited by wandering minstrels, it passed from one generation to another, till finally, in the latter half of the twelfth

century, these scattered songs gradually assumed a connected form; or were taken, by some unknown poet, as the basis for the construction of a connected version of the legend (both of these theories find their adherents among the critics); and in their final shape, as the *Nibelungen-lied*, have won a permanent place in literature, as the national epic of Germany. In this, as it must be considered, latest form of the legend the character of the story has greatly altered; the mythical element has entirely disappeared; the earlier incidents of the hero's story have been in part forgotten, in part passed lightly over; and all the interest is concentrated on that portion of Siegfried's career which connects him with the Burgundian Rhine kings; while the final scenes of the story, and the vengeance for Siegfried's death, take up more than one-half of the entire poem. The whole atmosphere, too, is absolutely mediæval, stamped throughout with the impress of the feudal spirit, with the fullest recognition of the bond existing between king and vassal, master and man; while the importance of the *rôle* assigned to Hagen, and the stern grandeur of his character, practically lift him to the level of Siegfried, and divide the poem into two parts, Siegfried being the hero of one, Hagen of the other.

With the Nibelungen-lied the legend may be held to have reached its full development. True,

the remembrance of the hero lived, and still lives on, enshrined in many varying forms: in the Folk-songs of Denmark and the Färöe Isles (in the latter curiously little altered); in German Volksbücher, and the works of the Meistersingers; and even to our own day, much distorted, but clearly recognisable, in current fairy tales. But for an understanding of the original form of the legend, so far as we can apprehend it, we do not need more than a careful study of the three main streams of tradition here mentioned, and it is in these three versions that we must seek for the explanation of the particular form into which Wagner has cast his drama of the Nibelungen Ring.

In order to make this task easier, it may be well, before turning to the study of the drama itself, to glance shortly at the varying forms of the story, as given in the versions named above.

The Volsunga-saga

(The saga commences with the origin of the Volsungs, and may be condensed as follows): There was a man named Sigi, who was the son of Odin; of him was born Rerir, who became the father of Volsung. (With Volsung the real interest of the saga begins.) He was a mighty king, and he built

for himself a hall, in the centre of which grew a great oak-tree, and the boughs of the tree spread above the roof, and the trunk was in the midst of the hall, and men called the tree the Branstock.

Now Volsung had ten sons and one daughter, and the eldest son and the daughter were twins, and they were named Sigmund and Signy, and were the noblest and fairest of all Volsung's children. King Siggeir of Gothland wooed Signy for his wife; and when the marriage feast was holden in Volsung's hall, there came in an old man, one-eyed, wrapped in a cloak, and bearing a sword in his hand, and he smote the sword into the Branstock, bade him who could draw it out take it as a gift, and forthwith departed. All the heroes strove to draw out the sword, but none might move it till Sigmund, Volsung's son, laid hand to the hilt, and, lo, the sword came away as though it lay loose in the wood. Then Siggeir was jealous, and offered Sigmund gold for the sword, and when he might not win it, was wrathful, and would not wait for the end of the feast, but the next day he set sail for Gothland with Signy, his wife.

After a while it came to pass that Siggeir bade King Volsung and his sons to visit him in Gothland; and when they came, he fell upon them with his men, and they fought till King Volsung was slain, and his ten sons were taken captive, and they were set in the wild wood with their hands

and feet made fast in the stocks, and every night there came a fierce she-wolf who devoured one of them, till Sigmund alone was left alive. Then Signy sent honey to the hero, and her messenger smeared it on Sigmund's face, and even in his mouth; and when the wolf came, and would fain have licked off the honey, Sigmund caught its tongue in his teeth and drew out the tongue by the roots, and so slew the wolf, and burst his bonds; and he made himself a dwelling in the forest, and abode there, and Siggeir deemed that all the Volsungs were dead. But Signy was minded to avenge her father and brothers; so when her eldest son was ten years old, she sent him unto Sigmund to see if he were strong of heart and might aid them, and Sigmund bade the lad bake bread, while he went forth and sought for firewood; but when he came back the lad had done naught, for he feared that which was living among the flour. Then, as Signy bade him, Sigmund slew the lad, for he knew he was not strong of heart to aid them; and even so it went with Signy's second son.

Then there came a witch-wife to the queen, and Signy bade her change shapes with her, and so they did, and the witch-wife abode in the hall, and sat by the side of King Siggeir, and none knew it was not the queen; but Signy went her way to the wild wood, and prayed her brother to

give her shelter for the night. Sigmund saw she was a fair woman, and he prayed her to abide with him three nights, and so she did; then Signy went back to the hall, and she and the witch-wife took their own shapes again, and none knew what had been done.

In due time Signy bare another son, and she called him Sinfiotli, and the lad grew tall and strong, and was fierce and cruel of heart. And even as she had sent the others, so Signy sent this son to Sigmund, and Sigmund gave him flour to knead and bake, and went forth to seek for fire-wood, as aforetime; and when he came home, Sinfiotli had kneaded and baked the bread, and recked not that there was somewhat living within it; and they might not eat of the bread, for the deadliest of worms had been kneaded up within it. So Sinfiotli abode with Sigmund, and the two did many valiant deeds, and were feared of all men.

Now when a fitting time was come, the two armed themselves and went and hid in King Siggeir's hall; but King Siggeir's children saw them, and told their father (for which deed they were slain by Sinfiotli), and Siggeir took the two and bound them and threw them into a barrow, with a great stone between them, and built up the barrow. But Signy had wrapped Sigmund's sword in straw and laid it in the barrow, and the

two sawed the stone asunder, and brake through the barrow, and set the hall on fire, and bade Queen Signy come forth and save herself. Then the queen came forth in her royal robes, and spake unto her brother, and told him how it was she who came to him in the shape of a witch-wife, and that Sinfiotli was in very truth a Volsung, her son and his; and she spake and said she was minded to die with her husband, having now avenged her kin, and so she went back into the fire, and none saw her more.

Sigmund gat to himself great possessions, and wedded a queen named Borghild; but she hated Sinfiotli, and gave him poison, and he drank thereof and died; and Sigmund put away Borghild, and married Hjordis, the daughter of King Eylimi. Now King Lyngi, the son of Hunding, had also wooed Hjordis, and he was wrathful when she married Sigmund; and he gathered together an army and came against King Eylimi, and they fought a great battle, and Sigmund did valiant deeds, till there came against him an old man, one-eyed, and wrapped in a cloak, and Sigmund's sword brake on his spear, and he fell and died; but ere he died, he gave the pieces of his sword to Hjordis, and bade her keep them till the son she should bear him was grown, for he should be the noblest and most famed of all the Volsungs. Then there came

to the field of battle Alf, the son of Hjalprek, King of Denmark, and he took Hjordis and her handmaiden to his kingdom, and there Hjordis bare a son, and called him Sigurd; and in due time Hjordis wedded King Alf, and Sigurd grew up at the king's court. Now Sigurd's foster-father was named Regin; he was a wise man, and skilled in many matters, and a famous smith, but cruel and cunning of heart; and he urged on Sigurd to ask for a horse from the king, for he thought Sigurd might do valiant deeds, and he deemed he might make use of him. Then the king bade Sigurd go into the wood and choose a horse for himself; and on the way Sigurd met with an old man, long-bearded, and with one eye, who bade him drive the horses to the river; and they did so, and but one swam across, and that horse the old man bade Sigurd take for himself; it was of the kin of Odin's horse, and its name was Grani. Then Regin urged on Sigurd to win for himself wealth, and he told him of the dragon Fafnir, who lay on Gnita-heide, and had measureless store of gold, and he bade Sigurd slay the dragon and win the gold; and of the dragon and the gold Regin told him in this wise:—

There was a man named Hreidmar, and he was a mighty man and a rich, and had three sons—Fafnir, Otter, and Regin. Otter was a great fisher, and he loved to take upon him the shape of an

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otter, and abide in the water. One day as he had caught a salmon and lay on the bank beside it, there came past the three gods—Odin, Hönir, and Loke; and Loke threw a stone and slew the otter, and thought he had done well to win both otter and salmon at one cast. But when they came to the house of Hreidmar he knew the skin and saw that the gods had slain his son, and he bade them pay ransom of gold which should fill the skin and cover it as it stood upright. Loke knew that the dwarf Andvari, who dwelt in the water near by, had great store of gold, and that he was wont to take the shape of a pike and swim in the water; so he prayed Ran to lend him her net, and within it he caught the pike; nor would he let Andvari go till he had delivered up all his gold, yea, and the gold ring by whose power the gold was increased. Andvari was wrathful, and he cursed the gold and the ring, and said it should bring death on all who held it. But Loke took the gold, and filled the otter skin, and set it on its feet, and covered it with gold; and Hreidmar looked upon it, and he saw one hair of the otter's muzzle, and that they must needs cover with Andvari's ring. Then Loke told them of Andvari's words, and bade them beware of the curse. And so it fell out that Fafnir slew his father for the sake of the gold, and drove out his brother, and took the shape of a monstrous dragon,

and dwelt with the treasure on the Gnitaheide.

Now when Sigurd heard the tale, he promised Regin that if he would forge him a sword he would slay Fafnir and avenge him; but Regin could in no wise forge such a sword as might serve Sigurd, but the blade brake asunder whenever Sigurd tried it. Then Sigurd went to his mother, and prayed of her the fragments of his father's sword; and Regin forged them into a wondrous good weapon, and it was called Gram, and was the best of all swords.[1]

Then Regin would have had Sigurd ride forth and slay Fafnir, but Sigurd bade him wait till he had avenged his father Sigmund; and he gathered him ships and sailed forth and slew the sons of Hunding, King Lyngi and his brothers, and avenged his father. After this Regin and Sigurd set forth for the slaying of Fafnir; but Regin was treacherous of heart, and thought to slay Sigurd and win the Hoard for himself. There came an old man, long-bearded and one-eyed, and he counselled Sigurd to dig pits that the blood of the dragon might run away, and sit in one and smite the dragon through the heart; and even so Sigurd did, and slew Fafnir, and in dying Fafnir spake that the gold should be the bane of Sigurd and of all who should win it.

[1] Nevertheless, the sword forged by Wieland, Mimung, appears to have been a better weapon than Gram.

Then Regin bade Sigurd cut out and roast the heart of Fafnir; but as it roasted, Sigurd put his finger to it, and the blood burned him, and he laid his finger in his mouth to cool it, and, lo, he understood the voice of the birds, and hearkened to what they said. And the birds spake of the treason of Regin, and how he would fain slay Sigurd; and of the ring of fire round Hindfell, and how a maiden slept within it. Then Sigurd drew his sword and smote off Regin's head; and rode to Fafnir's lair, and heaped the gold upon Grani, and then sprang upon the horse and rode forth to Hindfell. And when he came to Hindfell and saw the fire burning round it, he was nowise dismayed, but rode through the fire and came to the Burg, and found there a maiden sleeping. Then Sigurd drew his sword, and cut off her armour, and the maid awakened, and knew Sigurd, and told him how that she was the Valkyrie Brynhild; and because she had disobeyed Odin's will, and chosen one for the victory whom he willed to be slain, Odin had smitten her with the sleep-thorn and cast her into a magic slumber, and fated her to become a mortal woman and to wed as women wed. Then Sigurd and Brynhild spoke long together, and she taught him runes, and much wisdom, and they plighted their faith to each other ere they parted.

Now when Sigurd left Brynhild, he rode to

Hlymdale, whose lord was Heimir, and he had wedded Brynhild's sister. There Sigurd abode many days; and it came to pass one day that his hawk flew up into the window of an upper chamber, and Sigurd climbed up after it, and there he saw a woman sitting, and she was weaving in gold and colours a fair web whereon were all his deeds. Then Sigurd asked who the woman might be, and they told him she was Brynhild, Budli's daughter. Then Sigurd deemed her the fairest of women, and he went to her, and they plighted troth to each other, and he gave her Andvari's ring.[1]

Now there was a king named Giuki, who ruled a realm south of the Rhine, and he had three sons—Gunnar, Hogni, and Guttorm—and one daughter, Gudrun; but his wife was Grimhild, and she was a wise woman, and skilled in magic. To this hall came Sigurd when he rode forth from Hlymdale, and there he abode many days; and the king deemed it would be well if Sigurd was of their kin, for he was a mighty man, and had great riches. So Grimhild mixed a magic drink, and

[1] This second meeting of Sigurd and Brynhild is very puzzling. The saga refers in no way to the previous meeting on Hindfell, and seems to see no contradiction between the description of Brynhild as a Valkyrie and the fact of her having a mortal sister, and being a ward of Heimir's. Two separate personages have evidently become united in Brynhild, and in this earlier version of the saga the fusion is incomplete.

when Sigurd tasted it he forgot Brynhild and his oath; and he sware blood-brotherhood with Gunnar and Hogni (but Guttorm their brother was not there), and wedded Gudrun their sister, and dwelt in the halls of the Niflungs.

Then it came to pass that Grimhild spake to Gunnar, her son, that he should win Brynhild for his wife, and he thought it good; and Gunnar, Hogni, and Sigurd rode forth to the hall of Budli, and asked for the hand of his daughter, and the king said she must wed even as she willed. So they rode to Hlymdale, and Heimir spake the same, and said Brynhild would wed none save him who rode through the fire round her Burg of Hindfell. Then the three heroes rode to Hindfell, but Gunnar's horse turned back, and would not face the flame; then Gunnar took Grani, Sigurd's horse, but neither would Grani stir. So Gunnar and Sigurd must needs change shapes, even as Grimhild had taught them; and Sigurd, in Gunnar's semblance, rode through the fire and won Brynhild for Gunnar's wife; and he took Andvari's ring, which he had given to Brynhild, and her girdle, and gave them to Gudrun. Then Brynhild went to Hlymdale, and spake unto Heimir that she had deemed none but Sigurd could have done this deed; but she must e'en abide by her word, and Aslaug, her daughter and Sigurd's, should abide with Heimir. So Brynhild went into

the land of the Niflungs and wedded Gunnar; and when the feast was ended, Sigurd remembered all that was past, and how he had pledged himself to Brynhild, but he spake no word of the matter.

After many days the queens went to the river to bathe, and Brynhild waded highest up the stream; and said that in this, as in other matters, she would be above Gudrun, for she had married a mighty king, and Gudrun but the captive and bondman of King Hjalprek. Then Gudrun waxed wrathful, for she deemed her husband the mightiest of men; and in her anger she showed Brynhild Andvari's ring, and told her how it was Sigurd, and not Gunnar, who had ridden through the fire and won her to wife. Then Brynhild waxed exceeding wrathful, and was fain to slay Sigurd; but since Gunnar and Hogni had sworn brotherhood with him, they feared to break their oath. Now Guttorm, their brother, had not sworn the oath, so they worked upon him with many words, and with magic drinks, till he promised to do Brynhild's will; but when he entered Sigurd's chamber, the eyes of the hero were so keen and terrible that he durst not face him, and twice over he turned away, but the third time Sigurd was sleeping, and Guttorm smote him to the heart with his sword. Then Sigurd awoke, and took his sword Gram and flung it after Guttorm, and it cleft him in twain, and one-half fell within the

threshold, and one-half without. Then Gudrun awoke and cried for sorrow, and smote her hands together, till all the glasses on the board rang, and the geese on the roof-tree cried aloud; but Brynhild laughed when she heard the cry. Then Brynhild bade Gunnar build a funeral pyre, and lay her beside Sigurd, and with a sword she smote herself to death, and it was done even as she said, and they twain were burned together; but Gudrun fled to Denmark to the hall of King Alf, and abode with Thora, the daughter of Hakon, many days.

After a time it came to pass that King Atli, the son of Budli, the brother of Brynhild, wooed Gudrun for his wife; and because her brothers prayed her straitly, and her mother mixed her a drink of forgetfulness, she forgave the wrong they had done her, and wedded Atli, and fared with him to his own land.

Now Atli was, of all men, the most greedy of gold, and he bethought him of the treasure which Sigurd had won from the dragon, and would fain have it for his own. Then he sent a messenger and prayed Gunnar and Hogni to come to his land; but Gudrun, because she misdoubted her husband, took a gold ring, and wrote in it runes of warning, and bound a wolf's hair about it, and sent it to her brothers; but the messenger looked at the runes, and altered them as if Gudrun had

bidden her brothers to her, and so he gave the token to Gunnar.

Gunnar was fain to journey to Atli's land, but Hogni thought ill of it; yet because they heard that Atli was old and feeble, and that they might rule over his land, they said they would go; yet their wives, Glaumvor and Kostbera, prayed them not, for, they said, their dreams betokened evil. Yet ere the kings set forth on their journey, they took the treasure which Sigurd won from the dragon, and sunk it in the Rhine, and no man knows where it is hidden to this day. But when the Niflungs came to the land of Atli, they found all his folk armed and in battle array, and knew they were betrayed. Then a mighty fight began, and the Niflungs fought till the field ran with blood; and they drove Atli and his men back into the hall, and fought there, and Gudrun clad herself in shield and helmet and fought beside her brothers. Now the fight lasted till all the Niflungs save Gunnar and Hogni were slain, and Atli laid these two in bands, and bade them tell him where the treasure, which is called the Niflung Hoard, was hidden; and Gunnar said he might not tell him while Hogni lived, but if he saw Hogni's heart, he would then tell of the hiding-place. So they cut Hogni's heart out of him while he was yet alive, and he laughed aloud as they did it, and they bare it to Gunnar. But when Gunnar saw it, he

said now none but he knew where the Hoard was hid, and he would tell no man. So Atli bound Gunnar's hands and laid him in the worm-garden; but Gudrun sent him a harp, and he played on it with his feet till none of the serpents dare touch him, save one adder, which crept to his heart and stung him; so Gunnar died.

But Gudrun was fain to avenge her brothers; so she took her two sons that she had borne to Atli, and slew them, and made wine-cups of their skulls, and mingled their blood with the wine, and roasted their hearts, and gave them to Atli to eat. And when Atli lay drunk on his bed, she, and Niflung, the son of Hogni, drave a sword through his heart, and set the Burg on fire; and so Atli died. But Gudrun went down to the seashore, and cast herself into the waves, and they bare her to the land of Jonakr, and he wedded Gudrun, and she lived long with him, and bare him three sons.

The Thidrek-saga

(This version of the legend, though evidently following in many particulars the source of the Volsunga-saga, or it may be the Volsunga-saga itself, yet differs from it in many important particulars, the most essential difference being in the account of Sigurd's birth and bringing up.) This

is the account given by the Thidrek-saga:—There was a king named Sigmund, who had wedded Sisibe, the daughter of Nodung, King of Spain. Shortly after his marriage, Sigmund left his kingdom to go to the aid of his brother-in-law, who would fight against Pulinenland.

Now Sigmund left his kingdom and his wife in the care of two of his nobles, Herman and Artwin, but these two were traitors, who would fain win the love of the queen for themselves; and when she would not listen, they cast about in their minds how they might escape the wrath of King Sigmund, for they feared lest the queen should tell him of their ill-doings. So when Sigmund returned, the two nobles rode to meet him, and accused the queen of a guilty passion for her serving-man; and Sigmund, in his anger, bade them take the queen to a lonely wood, and there cut out her tongue, and leave her to perish. Then Sisibe, thinking that her husband had sent for her, rode with the two traitors into the forest; but when Artwin would have carried out the king's command, Herman took pity on her innocence and beauty, and would do her no harm.

So the two fought; and as they fought, the queen, in her terror, gave birth to a son, and she laid the babe in a glass casket she was bearing with her. Now Herman got the better of the fight, and Artwin fell at the queen's feet, and in

his death-agony he struck the casket, and it fell down the bank into the river, and was borne away on the current; and when the queen saw that the babe was lost, so great was her sickness and her terror that she fell dead.

The river bare the casket towards the sea, and it was ebb-tide, and the casket smote against the rocks and broke, and the babe lay and wept bitterly. There came a hind out of the wood, and she came to the child and bare it in her mouth to her lair, and suckled the babe with her own fawns, and the boy grew tall and strong.

Now, there was a cunning smith named Mimir, and he had a brother Regin, who, because of his skill in magic and his evil deeds, had been changed into a dragon, and dwelt in a forest, and dealt death to all who came in his way, saving his brother alone. Now, one day Mimir was burning charcoal in the wood, when a naked child came out of the bushes and ran up to him; it was a fair boy, and well grown, but unable to speak; and as Mimir caressed the boy, a hind came out of the wood and came to the child and licked him all over. So Mimir knew this was a strayed babe whom the beast had nourished; and having no child, he took him home, and gave him the name of Sigfrid, and brought him up as his foster-son. But Sigfrid grew up of a fierce and unruly nature, and he ill-treated the other lads who came to learn

of Mimir, and Mimir's serving-men, till they all feared him exceedingly. Nor was he better at smithying, for when Mimir sent him to the forge he smote so hard that he split the anvil in two and brake the tongs. Then Mimir sent him forth to the wood to burn charcoal for him, and gave him provisions for nine days, and told Regin of his coming, for he hoped the dragon would slay Sigfrid. But when the dragon came against him, Sigfrid snatched a tree-trunk out of the fire, and beat the dragon on the head with the burning wood till he had slain him. And with that he was hungry, for he had eaten all his food at one meal, and he cut up the dragon and put the flesh in his kettle; and he put his hand in to try if it were cooked, and his hand was scalded, and he put it to his lips; and when he tasted of the blood of the dragon, he understood the voice of the birds, and he heard how they spake of Mimir's treachery, and how the dragon was Mimir's brother. Then Sigfrid took the blood of the dragon, and wherever it touched his skin, the skin became hard like horn. So he stripped off his clothes, and bathed himself in the blood, and his skin was as horn all over, save between his shoulders, where he could not reach; then he did on his clothes again and went homeward, bearing the head of the dragon in his hands. When his companions saw him they were terrified, and fled to the woods and hid

themselves; but Mimir spoke gently to him, and offered him a suit of armour and a sword, and bade him go to Brynhild's palace and ask of her the horse Grani. Then Sigfrid smote off Mimir's head with his sword, and went on his way to Brynhild's palace; and when he came to Seegard, he burst open the doors, and slew seven warders and seven knights who would forbid his entry, and made his way to Brynhild's chamber. The maiden welcomed him kindly, and told him of his parentage, which before he knew not, and bade him take the horse Grani; and Sigfrid rode forth to King Isung of Bertangaland, and became his standard-bearer. (It appears later on that at this first meeting Sigfrid and Brynhild plight their troth to each other, but the saga-writer does not record it. After Sigfrid's coming to King Isung we have a full account of the arms and appearance of the twelve companions of Thidrek (Dietrich) von Bern, of their fight with King Isung, his eleven sons and standard-bearer, Sigfrid, which leads up to the arrival of the latter with Thidrek, Gunther, and Hagen at Worms, and the taking up once more of the thread of Sigfrid's story.) Now Aldrian was king of Nibelungenland, and he had four sons—Gunther, Hagen, Gernoz, and Gislher—and one daughter, Grimhild; but though all men thought Hagen the son of Aldrian, he was in truth the son of an elf, who had come to Queen

Oda as she lay asleep in a garden; and his countenance was pale as ashes, and his face terrible to look upon; moreover, he had but one eye. And Sigfrid wedded Grimhild, and ruled over half of the kingdom; and the Niblungs were accounted great heroes, and feared by all. Then Sigfrid said to Gunther that it would be well if he should marry Brynhild, and that he would guide him to her palace, and Gunther thought it good; so they came to the palace of Brynhild, who welcomed them all save Sigfrid, and him she would not welcome because he had taken a wife. Then Brynhild asked Sigfrid why he had broken his vows to her, and Sigfrid said that she had no brother, and he deemed it wiser to marry the sister of a mighty king, such as Gunther, than to marry her.[1] Then Brynhild said, since better might not be, she would wed Gunther; but on the marriage night she would treat him in no way as her husband, and when he would have forced her to yield to him, she bound him hand and foot with her girdle, and hung him to the wall, and so she did the second and the third nights. Gunther spoke of his grief to Sigfrid, and Sigfrid told him that so long as Brynhild was a maiden, a man might hardly overcome her. So Sigfrid, at Gunther's wish, clad

[1] It will be seen here that there is no suggestion of magic influence; Sigfrid's conduct is determined by motives of self-interest entirely.

himself in Gunther's clothes, and took his place in the marriage-chamber; and when Brynhild would have treated him as aforetime, he wrestled with her and overcame her, and took from her her maidenhood, and took the gold ring from off her finger and gave it to Grimhild; but Brynhild thought it had been Gunther. (The saga does not say how long they dwell in peace together; but, as in all the versions, the *dénouement* is brought about by Brynhild's contemptuous treatment of her sister-in-law, which provokes Grimhild to retaliate by revealing the secret intrusted to her.) Brynhild was very wrathful, and she went out to meet her husband and Hagen as they returned from hunting, and prayed of them to slay Sigfrid; and inasmuch as Gunther deemed that Sigfrid had won to himself too much power, he promised that it should be as she willed. So they proclaimed a great hunting, and Hagen bade the cook salt well their food, and give them but little to drink, and so it was done; and when the heroes would quench their thirst at a brook, Gunther and Hagen drank first; and as Sigfrid bent down to drink, Hagen smote him with a spear in his back, and so he died. Then they lifted his dead body on his horse and went homeward; and Brynhild met them, and said it was a fair hunting, and bade them bring the body to Grimhild; and they burst open the doors of Grimhild's chamber, and laid the body in

the bed beside her. Then Grimhild awoke; and when she saw the wound in Sigfrid's back, and that neither helmet nor shield were smitten, she knew he had been slain by treachery. Hagen said a wild boar had slain him; but Grimhild answered, 'That wild boar wast thou, Hagen.'

King Attila of Susa hearing that Sigfrid was dead, and being himself a widower, sent messengers to ask the hand of Grimhild, though his wife Erka had prayed him not to wed a wife of the Niblungs, lest it be to the ruin of him and his folk. Now Grimhild, knowing Attila was a mighty king, was willing to wed him, for she thought she might so avenge the death of Sigfrid. And after seven years she prayed him to send for her brothers to his land, and told him of the great treasure which Sigfrid had won from the dragon (this is the first notice we have of the Hoard in the Thidrek-saga), and Attila, who was greedy of gold, was willing to ask them. But Hagen spake to Gunther, and warned him that Grimhild had evil thoughts in her heart; and Queen Oda dreamt ill dreams, and would have kept her sons back from the journey, but Gunther was bent on going, so the Niblungs set forth with one thousand men. When they came to where the Rhine and the Danube meet, they had no boat to carry them over, and must camp for the night on the bank, and Hagen kept watch. He came on an inland

water where certain water-maidens (*meer-frauen*) were bathing, and he took their clothes as pledges, and asked of them where he could find a ship, and if their journey should be of good fortune; and the water-maidens told him of a ferryman near at hand, but said their journey should bring them ill-luck, and that none of the Niblungs should cross the stream again. Then Hagen slew them for their evil tidings, and found the ferryman, and gave him a gold ring to ferry them over; but when they had crossed the stream, he smote off the ferryman's head, lest he tell Attila they had crossed in battle array. Then they came to the land of the Margraf Rodingeir, and he and his wife Gutelinda received them with all honour, and betrothed their daughter to Gislher, and gave rich gifts to all the heroes, and Rodingeir rode with them to Attila's court. Attila received the Niblungs well, and sent Thidrek von Bern (who is dwelling as an exile at Attila's court) to meet them; but Grimhild only asked if her brothers had brought the Niblung gold, and Hagen made her scornful answer; and when they asked Grimhild why she wept, she said it was for the death of Sigfrid. The next morning Thidrek warned Hagen that Grimhild meant evil towards them; and when she prayed the Niblungs to lay aside their armour for the feast, they would not.

Then Grimhild prayed Thidrek to avenge her

of her wrongs, and he would not, but Irung promised to fight for her. When they were seated at the feast, the queen sent her young son, and bade him smite Hagen in the face, and Hagen struck off the child's head, and so the fight began; and the Niblungs fought their way into the garden, but could not pass the gates, for Grimhild had bade them spread raw ox-hides without, so that the heroes slipped and fell when they would pass through. All that day the Niblungs held the garden; but when night fell, Hagen bade them break down the wall, and they made their way into the streets, but their foes were so many that they beat them back. Then the Niblungs called on Thidrek von Bern to aid them; but since Attila was his host, he might not fight against him, but neither would he fight against the Niblungs. Then the Huns took Gunther captive and bound him, and cast him into the snake-tower, and he was stung to death; but Hagen fought his way to a hall in the palace, and Gislher and Gernoz followed him. Then Grimhild bade them set the hall on fire over Hagen's head; but as they might not slay him, or drive him out, Irung came against Hagen and wounded him, but Hagen cleft Irung in twain, and he fell, and the road where he fell is called Irung's Way to this day. (There seems to be a confusion with another Iring, after whom, some traditions say, the Milky

Way was called Irings-strasse.) Markgraf Rodingeir saw that his friends were slain, and he was very wrathful, and came against the Niblungs, and they fought, and Gislher slew him. When Thidrek von Bern knew that Rodingeir was slain, he must needs avenge him; and he and Master Hildebrand came against the Niblungs, and Master Hildebrand felled Gernoz and Gislher, but Thidrek and Hagen fought long time before either would yield. But Thidrek grew so wrathful, that his breath was as flames of fire, and Hagen's armour grew hot upon him, till he could no longer bear it, and he yielded himself to Thidrek. (Thidrek's fiery breath is frequently referred to in the sagas; it is a proof of his supposed demoniac origin.)

Then Grimhild took a fiery brand and thrust it into the mouths of Gernoz and Gislher, to see if they were dead, and Gernoz was dead, but Gislher was not before this, but the burning brand slew him. Now Thidrek deemed she was a devil, and not fit to live, and smote her asunder with his sword. And Hagen was so sorely wounded he might not live; but when he was dying he gave the keys of the cave where he had hidden the Niblung Treasure to the maiden who had tended him, and bade her give them to the son she should bear him. And she bare a son, and he grew up at Attila's court, and in due time she gave him the keys; and the lad spake to Attila, and promised

him great riches if he would come with him to the cave. Then the king did so, and Hagen's son shut the door upon him, and laid rocks before it, and so Attila starved to death, and none has found the Treasure to this day.

It will be sufficient here to note the more important divergencies between this version and that of the Volsunga-saga; these are: The account of Sigfrid's parentage, birth, and upbringing; his first meeting with Brynhild, and the circumstances under which he takes Gunther's place; his marriage with Grimhild, and his death. The birth of Hagen; the part played by Grimhild in the destruction of the Niblungs; and the complete change of 'motif' in the latter part of the story—it is as murderers of Sigfrid, not as possessors of the treasure, that they are slain; the appearance of Thidrek von Bern; the hiding of the Niblung Hoard in a mountain cave instead of in the Rhine; and the circumstances attending the birth of Hagen's son and the death of Attila, though the 'motif' for the latter is identical with that of the Volsunga-saga.

The Nibelungen-lied

(As has been remarked before, the whole tone and feeling of the Nibelungen-lied is far more mediæval, and less primitive, than that of the

two versions already given; contrary to both, it passes over the birth and early years of the hero; but so far as we can tell from indications, the tradition at the root is more in accordance with the Thidrek- than with the Volsunga-saga.)

There was a fair princess named Kriemhild dwelling at Worms on the Rhine. She was daughter to Dankrât and Uote, and her brothers were Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher. They were Burgundians, and mighty kings, and had brave vassals, of whom the chiefest was Hagen of Tronege. Now the fame of Kriemhild's beauty and sweetness had spread to the Netherlands; and Siegfried, the son of King Sigmund and Sigelinde, who reigned at Xanten on the Rhine, heard of her, and would fain win her to wife. Then he came to Worms with a gallant following, and bade Gunther give up his kingdom to him; but Gunther spake him fair, and bade him be his brother-in-arms, and abide with him at Worms, and Siegfried did so. None at Worms knew Siegfried save Hagen, who though he had not seen the hero had heard tell of his deeds: how one day, as he rode alone, he came upon Schilbung and Nibelung, who had borne the Nibelung Hoard out of a mountain cave, and would divide it between them. They prayed Siegfried to aid them, and gave him the good sword Balmung in payment; but being dissatisfied with his division of the gold, they fell

upon him, and Siegfried slew them; and having further overthrown Alberich, who would have avenged his master, and won from him the *Tarn-kappe*, took the Hoard for himself, and left it in the care of Alberich, who had sworn fidelity to him. Further, how Siegfried had slain a dragon and bathed in its blood, so that his skin had become hard as horn.

For a year Siegfried dwelt with Gunther, and aided him in his wars with the Saxon kings, ere he beheld Kriemhild. Now Gunther heard of the beauty of Brunhild, queen of Island, and was minded to win her to wife, and prayed Siegfried to help him, and Siegfried promised to do so if Gunther on his part would give him Kriemhild his sister; and so they sware one to the other.

Brunhild was the strongest of women, and she would wed none save the man who should overcome her in three trials of strength—in throwing the spear, in hurling the stone, and springing after it; and Gunther knew that save for Siegfried's aid he could not win her. Siegfried guided them by water-ways to the castle of Isenstein, and Brunhild knew Siegfried, and deemed he had come to woo her, and feared him as the strongest of men. (These are the only indications we have of any previous connection between Brunhild and Siegfried.) But Siegfried said he was but 'man' to Gunther, who was a mighty king, and had come

to try his strength with Brunhild. Now Siegfried had with him the *Tarn-kappe*, which not alone made its wearer invisible, but also gave him the strength of twelve men; and when Gunther would try his strength against Brunhild, Siegfried put on the *Tarn-kappe*, and it was he who did the feats, though men deemed it was Gunther. Brunhild owned herself vanquished, and took Gunther for her husband. The wedding feast was holden at Worms; and there, as Gunther had sworn, he gave Kriemhild to Siegfried to wife, but Brunhild wept that he should wed his sister to a vassal, as she deemed Siegfried to be. (The story of the bridal night is the same as in the Thidrek-saga, but more drastically treated; it is on the second night that Siegfried, with the help of the *Tarn-kappe*, overcomes Brunhild, and the struggle is so fierce that the hero is almost vanquished.)

Siegfried and Kriemhild departed for the Netherlands, and reigned at Xanten in peace for ten years. But Brunhild thought it ill that Siegfried came not to Worms to do homage to her husband, and she bade Gunther tell him to come hither; but Gunther, who would not tell Brunhild how Siegfried had but called himself Gunther's man to help him win her, was unwilling, till his wife wrought upon him to bid Siegfried and Kriemhild to a great feast at Worms. Then they met as friends, but Brunhild was proud, and spoke

scornful words to Kriemhild, and said she had but married a vassal of Gunther's, and bade her stand aside while she went first into the Minster; and Kriemhild in her wrath said that Siegfried was no vassal of Gunther's, and further, that he, and not Gunther, had been Brunhild's first husband, and showed as proof the ring Siegfried took from Brunhild. Then Brunhild, when she knew that she had been deceived, demanded vengeance on Siegfried, and Hagen, who deemed that the honour of his master's house was at stake, sware to do her bidding. So they raised a false alarm of war with Saxony, and Gunther prayed Siegfried to aid him.

Then Hagen went to Kriemhild and asked how he might best shield Siegfried in the battle, and Kriemhild told him no weapon might pierce Siegfried save between his shoulders, and she sewed a mark on his garment that Hagen might know the place. The false messengers brought tidings that the King of Saxony desired peace, and the heroes who had assembled for war would go a-hunting in the Waskenwald. But Hagen bade the butler forget the wine. In the hunt, Siegfried slew far more than any of his comrades, and he took a bear alive and fastened it to his saddle-bow, and so brought it into camp, and let it loose among the serving-men, and terrified them greatly. And when the heroes had eaten

and were thirsty, Siegfried bade Gunther and Hagen race with him to the spring, and though he bare his weapons he won the race; and when he knelt down to drink he laid aside his spear, and Hagen took it and smote him between the shoulders with his own weapon, and so slew him. Then Hagen and Gunther laid the body upon a horse and brought it back to Worms, and laid it at Kriemhild's door; and when she came forth in the early morning to Mass, her husband lay dead at her feet. Gunther and Hagen said that robbers had slain him; but Kriemhild knew well that it was Hagen, and when he drew near to Siegfried's body the wounds burst forth bleeding afresh. They buried Siegfried with great honour, and King Sigmund went home to the Netherlands, but Kriemhild abode at Worms; and because Hagen feared she might use the gold of the Nibelungen Hoard to win to herself friends and avenge Siegfried, he took away the keys of the treasure-chamber from her.

After thirteen years King Etzel would woo Kriemhild for his wife, and he sent the Margrave Rudiger as his messenger, and at first Kriemhild said nay; but when Rudiger sware that if any had done her wrong he would avenge her, she consented, for she ever remembered how Hagen had slain Siegfried.

And after thirteen years again, Kriemhild sent

messengers to pray that her brothers and Hagen would visit Etzel's land; and Hagen knew that she meant treacherously towards them, but, since Giselher taunted him with cowardice, he would not remain at Worms, but would go with them.

(From this point the story closely agrees with the version of the Thidrek-saga, but is fuller of detail. In the interview with the water-maidens they tell Hagen that none of the Burgundians shall recross the stream save the king's chaplain; Hagen, to prove them wrong, when they have reached the further side, throws the chaplain into the water, intending to drown him, but he manages to escape and swim back across the Danube, and Hagen then knows that their fate is inevitable. When they have all crossed, Hagen destroys the ship and tells his companions of the prophecy. The reception by Rudiger, the betrothal of Giselher with Rudiger's daughter, and their journey together to Etzel's court, all agree with the saga; but Thidrek (here Dietrich) von Bern warns them, at the first meeting, of Kriemhild's meditated treachery.)

Then when they came to Etzel's court, Kriemhild came towards them; but she greeted none save Giselher, and demanded of Hagen if he had brought her the Nibelungen gold; but Hagen said nay, for Gunther had bid him sink it in the Rhine. And all the Huns were fain to see

Hagen, for he was fierce and terrible of aspect. Then he and his friend Volker sat on a bench without the hall, and Hagen held Siegfried's sword Balmung on his knee; and when Kriemhild passed he would not rise before her; and when she spake to the Huns that it was he who had slain her husband, Hagen said it was even so, but none of the Huns durst lay hands upon him. Then at night Kriemhild sent her men to slay the Nibelungs as they slept, but Hagen and Volker kept watch, and the Huns fled. And at daybreak Gunther and his men went to Mass, but they still ware their weapons, and said it was the custom in their land to wear their swords for three days at a feast; and Kriemhild knew that this was not true, and that her brothers had been warned. And that day, at the Tourney, Volker slew a great man of the Huns, but Etzel withheld his people from avenging his death, as it was but an ill chance.

Then Kriemhild prayed Dietrich to avenge her on her brothers, and he would not; and then she prayed Bloedelin, Etzel's brother, and he was willing, and he and his men set upon the Nibelungen men-at-arms in the hostelry, and slew nine thousand of them, but he himself was slain. Dankwart, who was the leader of the Nibelungs, fought his way to the hall where the princes were at meat, and cried out that their men were slain; and

Hagen smote off the head of Ortlieb, Kriemhild's son, and so the fight began; but Dietrich von Bern and the Margrave Rudiger would take no part in it.

Then Kriemhild bade them set the hall on fire above the Nibelungs, but they defended themselves bravely, and Hagen and Volker held the door; and when they were overcome with heat and thirst, they drank the blood of their slain enemies, and it seemed to them as wine. Kriemhild reminded Rudiger how he had sworn to avenge her on her enemies, and bade him fight with her brothers; and because he feared lest he should lose his soul if he brake his oath, he went against them with a heavy heart; and because Hagen's shield was splintered he gave him his, and neither Hagen nor Volker would fight with him, but he and Gernot fought, and they smote each other so fiercely that both fell down dead. (Now Kriemhild would have let her brothers go free if they would have yielded up Hagen; but because he had always been a true and faithful servant to them, they would not give him up to her will.) And when the Huns saw that Rudiger was dead, they made a great wailing, and Dietrich von Bern heard it, and sent to ask the cause; and when he knew, he bade his men go and pray the body of Rudiger, and to use courteous words. But Wolfhart was rash and passionate, and it fell out so

that Dietrich's men and the Nibelungens fought, and all Dietrich's men were slain except Master Hildebrand, who fled, and told the ill news to his lord; and of the Nibelungs, only Gunther and Hagen were left alive. Then Dietrich went unto them and prayed them to yield themselves to him, and he would promise them their lives; but they would not, and they fought till Dietrich overcame them both, and bound them, and delivered them up to Kriemhild. She threw Gunther into prison; and when Hagen refused to tell her where the Treasure was hidden so long as one of his lords lived, she bade them smite off Gunther's head and show it to Hagen. Then Hagen said, since all his lords were dead, none but God and he knew where the Treasure lay, and from Kriemhild it should ever be a secret. Then Kriemhild drew Siegfried's sword, and struck off Hagen's head; but when Master Hildebrand saw that so mighty a warrior had been slain by a woman, he would fain avenge him, and he took his sword and hewed Kriemhild in pieces. And here doth the story end. This is the woe of the Nibelungs.

It will be seen that in this last version of the legend we have very little new matter introduced. The most remarkable change is that in the account given of Siegfried's winning the Treasure,

which does not agree at all with either the Volsunga- or the Thidrek-saga; the circumstances of Gunther's wooing Brunhild, and the introduction of the *Tarn-kappe*. There is a 'Helm of aweing' among the dragon's Treasure in the Volsunga-saga, but it possesses no such powers as are ascribed to the *Tarn-kappe*. We note, too, that here, as in the Thidrek-saga, Brunhild does not die with Siegfried, but practically disappears from the story; and that Etzel plays a less important part than in either of the other versions.

The most remarkable feature, however, in the Nibelungen-lied is the ethical 'motif' which has moulded the latter part of the story, the old German conception of 'Treue' as faith and loyalty. Hagen slays Siegfried purely from loyalty to Brunhild, his liege lady; he goes to Etzel's court, knowing he is going to his death, through loyalty to Gunther, and defends his lord and his lord's secret to the last moment of his life. Gunther is, on his part, equally loyal to Hagen; he will not purchase his own safety by the sacrifice of his faithful vassal; and the character of the Margrave Rudiger, who prefers to die at the hands of the Nibelungs rather than break his vow to Kriemhild, or live knowing he has betrayed his friends, has often been held by critics to embody the most perfect type of mediæval chivalry. Kriemhild, too, repulsive as she becomes towards the end of

the poem, is actuated throughout by her loyalty to Siegfried's memory. It is this ethical significance which forms the distinctive quality of the Nibelungen-lied, and entitles it, in spite of the revolting details of carnage and slaughter, to be considered as the finest literary presentation of the legend.

The Nibelungen Ring

THE DRAMA

CHAPTER III

The Rhine-Gold

ARGUMENT

The Rhine-gold, hidden 'neath the waters of the river, is watched by the three Rhine maidens—Woglinde, Wellgunde, and Flosshilde. Wrought into a ring, the gold would bring universal dominion to its possessor; but none, save one who despises and forswears love, can weld it. The magic gold is stolen by force from the Rhine maidens by the Nibelung, Alberich, who has wooed them in vain, and they cry for help to Wotan.

But the gods themselves are in danger. Desirous of building a palace, they have called their foes, the giants, to their aid; and as reward for their labour, Wotan, trusting to Loge's cunning to enable him to evade the promise, has agreed to deliver up Freia, the goddess of youth, whose loss will bring old age and decay upon the gods. The palace built, Fafner and Fasolt, the giants, demand their payment; and Loge, called upon for his promised aid, avows that though he has sought through Heaven and Earth, he can find naught that may be held as equivalent for woman's worth and beauty. Then while the gods are in suspense, seeing no way out of the difficulty, he tells of the rape of the Rhine-gold, and how the magic ring has been wrought by Alberich, who hopes by its means to subdue all in Earth and Heaven to his will. The giants, between whom and the Nibelungs a feud has long existed, are greatly disturbed at the tidings, and finally announce that if the gods will win for them the Hoard of the Nibelungs, they will accept that as ransom for Freia, whom they hold as pledge in the meantime.

Wotan and Loge therefore descend to Nibelheim, where, by

the aid of the magic ring, Alberich is accumulating a vast hoard of treasure, and has further employed the skill of Mime to make for him a helmet, by the magic power of which he can change his shape, or become invisible at will. By Loge's cunning the gods succeed in binding the Nibelung, and refuse to loose him till he has paid over as ransom the entire Nibelung Hoard, together with helmet and ring. Deprived of this last, Alberich utters a curse upon all its future possessors; it shall bring death and destruction to all alike, till it return once more to his keeping.

The giants, with Freia in their power, return to claim the promised ransom, and, thrusting their staves into the earth before the goddess, demand that the gold shall reach a height sufficient to conceal her from view; the helmet of magic is added to the pile; but when all the gold has been heaped together, there is still a chink through which the eye of the goddess can be seen. To fill this the giants demand the ring, which is now on Wotan's hand; he at first refuses to part with it; but at the interference of the goddess Erda, who rises from the earth to warn him against incurring the curse invoked on the possessor of the ring, he adds it to the pile, and the ransom is complete. Freia is delivered up to the gods, and the curse of the ring forthwith begins to work; Fafner claims the greater part of the Hoard for himself, and, on Fasolt's resistance, slays him.

Donner and Froh call the spirits of the clouds together, and a rainbow bridge spans the valley, passing over which the gods enter Walhalla, while the wail of the Rhine maidens for their lost gold rises from the depths beneath.

The Hoard—Its home—Its original owners—The Niblungs—The myth of Swadilfari—Idun and Thiassi—The rainbow bridge—Walhalla.

In this Introduction to the Trilogy we find ourselves at once transported to a world of mystery, a world in which neither the bodily nor the spiritual eye can at once see clearly, and we apprehend with difficulty alike the actions and the

motives of those who dwell within it. Nor is this atmosphere of mystery other than fitting for the representation of a legend which finds its roots far back in the earliest period of man's conscious thought and incomplete expression; and with which Wagner has thought well to interweave the early searchings of his race after eternal truths, shrouded by them in obscure mythological parables, and interpreted by him in accordance with that system of philosophic thought most in harmony with his genius.

The object of the *Rhine-Gold* is to set forth, in accordance with the indications of the legend, such an account of the origin of the Treasure, and of the Ring which is its symbol, as shall explain its fatal power and render intelligible the curse which pursues all who, even innocently, possess it.

Now, in all this mysterious story which has woven into itself so many varying threads of history and legend, there is no more mysterious element than the Treasure itself. Whence did it come? Who were its original possessors? Why does it exercise so baneful an influence? Of all the versions, the Volsunga-saga alone professes to answer these questions, and even here the evidence is incomplete, and we are perforce led to the conclusion that before the legend had been transcribed, probably before it reached its settled

form, the origin of the Nibelungen Hoard had been forgotten.

The *ethical* idea of which the legend is an expression is undoubtedly that of the evil influence of gold, which, according to old German mythology, was operative alike on gods and men. The golden age, the time of the innocence of the gods, was before they knew gold; before the creation of the dwarf-race, who wrought the precious metal out of the earth, and thus brought the lust of gold and the passions of greed and avarice into the world. This idea is deeply imbedded in German mythology, and has been expressed under varying forms, of which undoubtedly the myth of the Nibelungen Hoard was originally one; therefore when Wagner, in his drama, brings into sharp relief the fatal effects of the desire of gold, and yet triumphantly proclaims it less powerful and less enduring than love, he is but expressing a thought which, from the first, was a vital and integral part of the legend.

Whence, then, came this gold, here represented as reft from, and returning to, the bosom of the waters? The versions of the legend give varying accounts; in the Volsunga-saga, as we see, it was originally the property of the dwarf, Andvari, a dweller in the waters, and is taken from him by Loke, who hands it over to Hreidmar, and Sigurd wins it from Hreidmar's sons: the final destina-

tion of the Hoard, too, is the Rhine,—thus it comes from, and returns to, the water. In the Thidrek-saga, on the other hand, there is no account of the original home of the Hoard; we learn casually that Sigfrid won it from the dragon; but how Regin, who is here the dragon, came into possession of it we are not told. Of the final fate of the Treasure we have an explicit account; it is hidden in a mountain-cave, where it remains concealed for ever from the sight of men. When we come to the Nibelungen-lied, we find that the Treasure is originally brought forth from a cave, and that Siegfried wins it from two brothers, Schilbung and Nibelung, though we are not told how they became possessed of it: its final destination is again the Rhine.

A popular version of the Siegfried story, the Siegfrieds-lied,[1] gives a different but analogous account of the Treasure. Kriemhild has been carried off by a dragon and imprisoned in a cave on the Drachenfels; Siegfried slays, not only the dragon, but the giant Kuperan, who guards the mountain, and rescues the princess. Near at hand, in a cave, the dwarf Eugel and his brothers have hidden the Treasure of their father, Niblung, who died of grief when his mountain was cap-

[1] No abstract of this has been given, as the version of the legend is so different as to be useless for the study of the drama.

tured by the giant. Siegfried finds the Treasure, and, thinking it the Hoard of the dragon, carries it off; but as Eugel has foretold that he shall have but a short life, he reflects that the gold will be of little use to him, and when he comes to the Rhine he throws it into the waters.

We have here four versions of the winning and the hiding of the Treasure: in one instance we find it comes from the water, in two from the earth (being found in a cave); the fourth, the Thidrek-saga, gives no explicit account of its home. The three first all agree in making its final resting-place the Rhine, but the Thidrek-saga again differs from them, and represents it as hidden in a cave, *i.e.* it returns to the earth, and not to the water.

Now, in every case it is noticeable that it is the version, either purely *German* in development, or avowedly based upon *German* tradition, which knows of the cave; the distinctively Northern variant only knows of the water. It is perfectly true that this Northern version as a whole is the more archaic in form, and more suggestive of the mythic character underlying the legend; but the original *source* is, as before said, *German*, and therefore, where the versions differ as decidedly as is here the case, it is necessary to examine more closely into the story before deciding that the Northern is, as a matter of course, the nearest to the original form.

An inquiry as to who were the original owners of the Treasure is necessary before we can solve the difficulty; and here we find that, in three out of the four versions, a *dwarf* is closely connected with it. In the Volsunga-saga it is taken from Andvari, and is his rightful property; in the Nibelungen-lied it is guarded by Alberich as the servant, first of the Nibelung brothers, then of Siegfried; in the Siegfrieds-lied it is the property of Eugel and his brothers. Further, in two out of these three instances a *giant* is also connected with it; in the Nibelungen-lied twelve giants help the Nibelungs to defend the Hoard, and a giant assists Alberich to guard the Treasure for Siegfried. Though the Volsunga-saga mentions no giant, yet the description of Fafnir as 'the greatest and grimmest of Hreidmar's sons, who would have all things according to his will,' is distinctly suggestive of his giant origin; and when Wagner in the drama represented him as a giant, he probably, as we shall see is often the case, instinctively reverted to the true form of the story.

If we turn to Northern mythology, we shall find that dwarf and giant alike are closely connected with each other and with the earth; the world itself was said to be formed out of the flesh of the giant Ymir, the first father of the race; and according to the Edda the dwarfs were the maggots which bred in the flesh of the giant, and were

endowed by the gods with the shape and mind of men; another account represents them as formed directly out of the earth. Their dwelling is in rocks and in the earth, and from it they make gold.

It is, of course, true that the sea-dwellers, mermen and maidens and their kings, are also held to possess great treasures; but even there the gold is heaped up in caves, and belongs rather to the bed of the sea than the sea itself, to the earth rather than the water. On the whole, it seems more in accordance with the indications of the legend to believe that originally the home of the Nibelungen Hoard was a mountain-cave, and its owner a dwarf, who most probably intrusted the guardianship of the Treasure to a giant, by whose death it was won; the dwarf himself does not seem to have been slain.

Who, then, are the Nibelungs, from whom the Hoard eventually takes its name? Certainly not the rightful owners: in every version they are subject to the curse, equally with the hero; and in whatever form we find them they suffer defeat, loss, and death. It is very difficult to discover who these Nibelungs originally are, from the fact that the name clings to the Treasure, and is transferred to its possessors for the time being: thus, in the Volsunga-saga, the Gibichungs become Niflungs after they become possessed of the Treasure by Sigurd's death; in the Nibelungen-

lied, Siegfried and his men are Nibelungs after they have won the Hoard from the original bearers of the name, while, at the end of the poem, the title is transferred to the Burgundians, the last owners of the gold. In the Thidrek-saga, Aldrian and his sons are Nibelungs throughout. It will be noticed that the name clings with strange persistency to the royal family into which Siegfried marries and through whom he comes to his death: the reason seems to be that, though not now the representatives of the original Nibelungs of the primitive legend, they have retained certain of their characteristics, and have become closely interwoven with a personality which is certainly part of the original myth. This, however, will be treated of later.

The name undoubtedly comes from the same root as Nifl-heim and Nifl-hell, the lowest of the nine worlds of Northern mythology, the home of mist and darkness, and abode of departed spirits; and it clearly indicates the other-world origin of the bearers of the name and one source of the fatal influence of the Treasure; for even had it not been cursed by its rightful owner, the very fact of its having been won from the under-world would make it a dangerous possession. The bearers of the name who committed the first theft of the gold were probably a father and two, or perhaps three, sons. In the Volsunga-saga it is Hreidmar

and his sons Fafnir and Regin; in the Nibelungen-lied it is the two brothers Schilbung and Nibelung, and the gold to be divided has generally been held to have been their inheritance from their father; in the Siegfrieds-lied we have Eugel and his brothers—their father, Niblung, is dead. The Thidrek-saga, though so scanty in indication, has two brothers, Mimir and Regin, both of whom Sigfrid slays, and from one of whom he wins the Treasure. This regular recurrence of father and sons as owning the Treasure before it comes into the hero's hands cannot be a merely accidental coincidence, and the explanation seems to be that in them we have a survival of the original Niblungs or Niflungs, beings of evil origin, who reft the gold from its rightful owner, and by so doing themselves fell victims to the curse which pursues all who become possessed of it. The manner in which the curse affects the hero himself will be discussed when we come to the closing scenes of the drama; on Siegfried it appears to work *indirectly*, but *directly* on his murderers, whose death, as related in the Volsunga-saga, was undoubtedly at first due to their possession of the fatal gold.

As to the final destination of the Treasure, the legend which represents it as being cast into the Rhine is probably correct; to throw it into the water would be the speediest means of restoring it to the powers of the under-world, to whom it un-

doubtedly belonged. That the Thidrek-saga gives a different version is easily to be accounted for by the fact that the compiler knew, and followed, both Northern and German tradition; having followed the Volsunga-saga by making Siegfried win the gold from the dragon, he preserved the German version by altering its ultimate fate: such instances of transposition are not unusual. On the whole, the evidence seems to point to the fact that Wagner's version, poetical as it undoubtedly is, does not represent the true origin of the Hoard, and that the Rhine was not the cradle, though it was the final resting-place, of the fatal gold.[1]

But leaving the baleful Treasure, let us now turn to the consideration of the feud between the gods and the giants, so vividly depicted in the drama. All students of German mythology know that the giants were the first of the unearthly races to come into existence, that their character and influence are represented as distinctly evil, and that they are the deadly enemies of the Asas, the gods who dwell in Asgard, who have overcome the giants and succeeded to their power. The story of the building of Walhalla, as given in the *Rhine-Gold*, is based upon the myth of Swadilfari, which runs as follows:—

[1] The character of Alberich will be discussed later on. Here it is sufficient to remark that he is certainly not a Schwarz-alf or a Niblung, and it seems doubtful whether he originally had any connection with the legend.

After the gods had built Midgard and Walhalla (which, according to mythology, they built themselves) a certain master-builder came to them, and offered to build them a Burg which should serve as defence against the giants, asking as reward the goddess Freyja, and the sun and moon. The gods held counsel together, and at Loke's advice promised to give him what he asked, provided that the Burg was built within the winter months, and that no man should aid him; were one stone lacking on the first summer day, he should forfeit all reward. The builder consented to the terms on condition that he might have the aid of his horse, Swadilfari, to which the gods readily agreed; but they were astonished when they saw the size of the blocks which the horse bare to the building, and how it did half as much work again as the man; and as the winter passed on and the Burg grew taller and taller, they became fearful of the ending of the matter. At last it wanted but three days to summer, and the Burg was finished all but the doorway; then the gods called upon Loke to aid them, since it was by his counsel they had made the contract. So Loke changed himself into a mare, and when the builder led his horse in the evening to collect stones for the next day's work, the mare ran out of the wood and neighed to the horse; and when the horse Swadilfari heard it, it brake the halter and ran into the wood after

the mare, and the builder must needs chase the horse all night and could not catch it, so he gathered together no stones, and the next day he did no work, and the Burg could not be finished in time. So when the builder saw this he flew into a great rage, and the gods knew that this was one of their foes, the mountain-giants, who had tried to betray them; and they called on Thor, and he came with his hammer and struck the giant on the head and slew him, and he fell down to Niflheim.

With this myth Wagner has apparently connected another, which tells how Loke, having fallen into the power of the giant Thjasse, wins his freedom by promising to betray the goddess Idun and her apples of youth into Thjasse's hands. This he does, and the gods discover the loss of Idun by finding themselves grow old and grey-headed. They inquire into the matter, and find out that Loke is, as usual, the source of the mischief, and therefore order him, on pain of death, to bring back Idun. This he promises to do if Freyja will lend him her falcon-dress, in which disguise he flees to Jötunheim, the abode of the giants, and carries off Idun in the shape of a nut or a swallow (there are two accounts).

The form of Freyja's ransom from the giants is, of course, based upon the account of Loke's ransom in the Volsunga-saga, which, alone of all

the versions, directly connects the gods with the Nibelungen Hoard, though in the legend, having promptly given up gold and ring, they are in no way affected by the curse. Still, as mythology distinctly connects the fall of the gods, the Götterdämmerung and Weltenuntergang (from which catastrophe, however, gods and men alike are to arise renewed, purified, and restored to their original innocence), with the love of gold, Wagner can hardly be deemed to have exercised too much poetical license in representing them as closely concerned in the fate of the Treasure, and following with the keenest interest the fortunes of the race destined to win it from its evil possessors. But inasmuch as these mythological events form no part of the original legend, it is unnecessary to examine them critically in order to see whether the version given by Wagner does or does not represent the original form of the story; it is sufficient for the comprehension of the drama to indicate the sources from which they are drawn.

The building of the rainbow-bridge by the gods themselves is in accordance with the mythological tradition; according to this, the rainbow binds heaven and earth together, and over it the gods ride daily to their seat of judgment by Urd's Brunnen, the spring which waters the roots of the world-ash, Ygdrassil. The home of the gods is in Asgard, with its twelve Himmels-burgen; of

these, according to the Grimnersmal, a song found in the Edda, Gladsheim is the fifth, and within Gladsheim is Walhalla, where Odin has his high seat. Of the dwellers in Walhalla we will speak more fully further on; here it is sufficient to say that the root of the name is the word Wal, signifying *choice*; the slain in war are the elect, chosen of Odin, hence a very general name for a battlefield is Wal-statt or Wal-platz.

With this entrance of the gods into Walhalla, Wagner closes the introduction to his Trilogy; the Himmels-burg is built, and the giants are baffled; but the love of gold has already touched with baleful hand the gods, the golden age of their innocence is over; their solemn pledge has been evaded, the fatal theft is accomplished, and the curse has already begun its work. How the evil destiny unrolls itself with relentless force, till it involves gods and men alike in one common ruin, is told in the succeeding drama.

CHAPTER IV

The Valkyrie

ARGUMENT

Sieglinde, daughter of Wälsing, has been carried off by robbers, her father and brother, as she believes, slain, and she herself married against her will to Hunding.

To the forest-dwelling of Hunding and Sieglinde there comes a fugitive outlaw, overcome by conflict and weariness, in whom Sieglinde finally recognises Siegmund, her twin-brother, and the predestined winner of the sword, Nothung, which at her wedding-feast a mysterious stranger had thrust up to the hilt in the trunk of the tree which supports their dwelling, and which can only be withdrawn by the bravest of men. Siegmund withdraws the sword with ease, claims Sieglinde alike as sister and bride, and the two fly together.

Wotan, in view of the inevitable conflict between Hunding and Siegmund, summons Brünnhilde, the Valkyrie, and bids her give the victory to Siegmund; but Fricka demands vengeance on the Wälsing, who had outraged the sanctity of the marriage vow, and, when Wotan resists, upbraids him with his own infidelity, Siegmund being, in truth, Wotan's son; against his will Wotan yields, and revokes his commands to Brünnhilde. The Valkyrie adjures him to give the reason for this change of purpose, and Wotan tells her of the fatal spell of the Nibelung Ring, which, till it is restored to its original owners, the Rhine-maidens, must be a source of danger to the gods. Should Alberich recover possession of it, he, who by cursing Love had succeeded in welding the Ring, can use its magic runes with fatal effect against the gods, and so bring about their total ruin.

Wotan himself is powerless to recover the talisman, having given it as payment for service to the giants, of whom the survivor, Fafnir, holds it. It can only be won by a hero who, unconscious of the spell and unaided by the gods, to whose law and favour he is a stranger, is driven by his own necessity to the task.

Such a hero Wotan had thought to find in Siegmund, the outlaw, defiant alike of the laws of gods and men; but Fricka has detected the truth that Siegmund is, in fact, no free agent, Wotan's will having been the moving power of his actions. It was Wotan who was his father, Wotan who had prepared the magic sword, Nothung, and Wotan who had led Siegmund to the dwelling of Sieglinde. Therefore Siegmund is ineligible for the task which the gods had assigned to him, and Wotan, his purpose penetrated by Fricka, must yield him up to her will. Brünnhilde, however, moved by admiration for Siegmund's dauntless bearing and love for Sieglinde, resolves to defy Wotan's expressed *will* and fulfil his hidden *wish*, by shielding Siegmund in the conflict. Wotan, however, interposes in wrath at her disobedience, the sword, Nothung, shivers on the spear of the god, and Siegmund falls, slain by Hunding. Brünnhilde flies with Sieglinde, who saves herself and her unborn child by taking refuge in the wood where Fafnir, in dragon form, watches over the Nibelungen Hoard.

The Valkyrie remains to brave the wrath of Wotan. In punishment for her disobedience the god banishes her from Walhalla, deprives her of her divinity, and condemns her to wed the mortal who shall rouse her from the magic slumber into which he will cast her. Brünnhilde beseeches that none save the bravest hero on earth (whom she foresees will be the son of Siegmund) shall waken her, and with this view entreats Wotan to defend her slumber by surrounding her with fire which none but the bravest may pass. Wotan yields, and, kissing her on the brow, he robs her of divinity and casts her into a slumber; then, striking his staff on the rock, flames spring up around the Valkyrie, amid which Wotan vanishes.

Siegmund and Sieglinde, their original character—Hunding—The Ragnar-Lodbrog-saga—The sword—Wotan—Original significance of his character—His relation to men—Fate—The Valkyrie—Different aspects of the Valkyrie—Sigrdrifa—Brynhild—Walhalla—The Sleep-thorn and Waberlohe—Loke, his significance.

No longer in the water depths of the Rhine, or the cloudland home of the gods, the world to

which the first day of the Trilogy introduces us is scarcely less mysterious than either; so primæval are its conditions, so lax its moral conceptions, so superhuman the force of the passions which rend and tear the dwellers within it. In truth, this Earth of the 'Ring' drama is not merely the meeting-ground for gods and men, but is also the stage in which the fate common to both is to be worked out; and even as they share one fate, so are they partakers of one nature; and would we understand their actions, we must bear in mind the fact that this world is *not* as our world, nor are these dwellers in it men and women but as we are. Intensely human are they, and yet *super*-human; their characters and passions have a Titanic force and grandeur, like the force of a mountain-torrent that scatters all around in chaotic confusion ere it makes for itself the channel in which its current may flow peacefully. History bears abundant witness to the force of the developed manhood of the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic races; Legend records the struggles of their undeveloped childhood.

In the *Valkyrie*, Wagner gives us the tragic history of the parents of the real hero of the drama, Siegfried; and here, with one important alteration—that of making Siegfried, instead of Sinfiotli, the child of the Volsung pair—he has closely followed the version of the Volsunga-saga. Whether this episode really belonged to the

original Siegfried-saga seems doubtful; and it is still more doubtful that Wagner's version represents the original facts. Such a parentage would not be out of keeping with the hero's mythical origin, but it does seem to stand outside the formula characterising the birth and upbringing of that special family of Aryan heroes to which Siegfried belongs.

In any case the story of Siegmund and Sieglinde (or Signy, as she is named in the Volsunga-saga)[1] bears marks of very high antiquity; and, though distinctly repellent to our ideas as told in the saga, and even more so as represented by Wagner, it loses on close examination much of its repulsive character.

Northern mythology, in common with other systems, appears originally to have regarded its deities as bisexual, uniting the male and female principle (an example of this will be found in the account of the giant Ymir, who, as a deity, precedes both the Vans and Asas);[2] at a later period we find the two separate and existing side by side

[1] Wagner probably changed the name of Signy to Sieglinde on account of the latter being the name given by the Nibelungen-lied to Siegfried's mother. Rassman considers Sieglinde to be one of the names of Brynhild as identified with Hilde. The manner in which the personalities of early mythology dissolve into each other is highly perplexing, and in most instances it seems better to adhere to the characters as represented in the legend, without trying to trace them to their original mythic source.

[2] Cf. Simrock, *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie.*

as male and female counterparts of the same idea, and in this form they seem to have been considered alike as brother and sister, husband and wife; *i.e.* they are *two* and yet *one* being—in fact, varying manifestations of the same principle. Thus Freyr and Freyja, who are themselves children of a brother and sister, Niördhr and Nerthus, seem originally both to have represented the power of spring: Freyr, the active, quickening principle (who became afterwards a sun-god), and Freyja the responsive, the blossom and foliage which are drawn out by the genial warmth of spring. Brother and sister, they were also, Simrock considers, at one time husband and wife. (Is it not possible that this special instance was in Wagner's mind when he composed the exquisite 'Lenz-lied,' which certainly gains in beauty and significance if regarded in this light?) In the same way we find that in German the Sun (feminine) is coupled with the (masculine) Day, and the Moon (masculine) with the (feminine) Night.

In this connection the instance of Isis and Osiris readily recurs to the mind, and Nerthus, mentioned above, has very many traits in common with Isis.

Now, German mythology knows a succession of deities, the first being the giants, who are considered as an evil principle, and who as noted above were, at least in the first instance, bisexual.

To them succeeded the Vans, a kindly race who seem to have been practically the powers of Nature personified; after a struggle with the Asas, who were originally of a more abstract and spiritual character, the Vans made peace with these latter, and were admitted into their ranks. The dominant gods of mythology, as we know it in its latest form, are Asas; but certain of the original Vans, such as Freyr and Freyja, mentioned above, hold high rank among them.

We are distinctly told, as a characteristic of these Vans, that they held marriage between brother and sister to be lawful, whereas the Asas forbade it, and dissolved such unions before admitting the partners in them into their ranks; a parable clothing the natural course of mythological development. There seems to be very little doubt that Siegmund and Signy, in the Volsunga-saga, were in their origin such a divine pair; we are expressly told that they were twins, *i.e.* they were originally one being, and their survival in the saga seems to be due to a reminiscence of this older and practically extinct race of gods. The saga regards them as it is as descendants of Odin, and therefore of superhuman nature, and their whole story is cast in a superhuman mould. It must be admitted that such characters lose the more, the more they are euhemerised; to represent them as mortals is to run the risk of making them

repulsive; they must be influenced by some force extraneous to themselves, be it Passion, or be it Fate, the irresistible power of which we ourselves as spectators acknowledge, before, as men and women, we can cordially accept and sympathise with them. The compiler of the Volsunga-saga seems instinctively to have felt this, when he represented Signy as practically embodied revenge. Considering the sanctity of the tie of blood, *Sippe*, among the Northern nations, and the treachery of which the Volsungs have been the victims, Signy's conduct, even though she sacrifices her womanhood and the natural feelings of a mother to her vengeance, is perfectly intelligible; and the final scene in which, her task accomplished, she chooses death with the husband she has betrayed rather than life with Siegmund, goes far towards mitigating the natural horror we feel for her conduct. Utterly outside all possible conceptions of womanhood, Signy is yet one of the most awful and imposing figures in the whole roll of Helden-saga.

At the same time, the companion of her vengeance, Siegmund, never loses his hold on our sympathy; his conduct is perfectly natural and legitimate throughout, and in the most repulsive feature of the situation he is an unconscious agent. It is Signy's overwhelming passion for revenge which dominates and explains the whole

situation; she, in fact, has remained superhuman, while Siegmund has become human.

When, however, we examine the situation in the *Valkyrie*, we find that the whole 'motif' is changed —it is no longer Passion, but Fate, which is the determining factor in the situation; and into this idea of Fate Wagner has introduced a complexity of thought which, unless the actors are able by the force of their own personality to enlist on their side the sympathies of the audience, must, by its very difficulty of comprehension, go near to wrecking the situation; emphasising, while it fails to explain, the repellent nature of their conduct.

The idea that Siegmund can only carry out the task, for which he has been born, by being independent of all laws, human and divine, and becoming practically a law unto himself, is undoubtedly a fine conception, but one which, at this early stage of the drama, it is not easy to grasp; and the extremely complex character assigned to Wotan makes it difficult for us to regard him, himself helpless in the grasp of Fate, as being really the operative agent in the conduct of Siegmund and Sieglinde.

This difficulty was really inherent in the nature of the task which Wagner set himself. German mythology, in the form in which we possess it, is highly complicated and marked by distinct stages of evolution in the conception of its characters.

Wagner, in order to provide an ethical background to his drama, and one which in essence and origin was curiously in harmony with his philosophical views, was compelled to compress these stages within the narrow limits of time required by the action, and this has inevitably increased the difficulty of understanding situations which require a clear grasp of the primæval, one may say pre-ethical, character of the actors. When we study this wonderful Siegfried legend in all its ramifications, tracing it back through historical development to mythical source, we feel that the task of giving adequate dramatic form to that alone would tax the power of genius to its utmost; but to treat it, as Wagner did, with philosophical developments based upon the most obscure and mystical aspect of Northern mythology was a task which no mind but his could have conceived, and no genius but his dared attempt. It is no lack of appreciation which compels one to admit that even Wagner was at times scarcely equal to the colossal demands of such a work, and that there are moments when the execution falls short of the conception, and the outward form fails to convey to our minds *all* that the dramatist would have had it express. Not only do we find that Sieglinde is in dramatic interest distinctly inferior to her prototype Signy, but we also feel that the wrongs inflicted upon her by Hunding are not in

themselves of a nature to justify her conduct. True, he has purchased her from robbers and married her against her will, but in those primitive times such conduct was hardly exceptional, much less unforgivable; and there is a certain rough chivalry in Hunding's treatment of Siegmund, and observance of the claims of *Gast-recht,* which makes the latter's flight with the wife of his host bear a disagreeably treacherous aspect. One is not surprised at Hunding's pursuit of the pair, and it certainly rather destroys sympathy with the hero, and sorrow at his fate, to have a lurking feeling that, after all, he deserved it! Lovers of the Volsunga-saga, and those familiar with Morris's magnificent poetical rendering of the episode, will hardly be willing to accept the actors in the *Valkyrie* as an adequate representation of the heroic Volsung brother and sister.

The remark made by Hunding as to the glittering worm which glances from the eyes alike of Siegmund and Sieglinde, shows that Wagner knew the Ragnar-Lodbrog-saga, which connects the story of Sigurd with the royal house of Norway. In this saga Aslaug, the daughter of Sigurd and Brynhild, in danger of being divorced from her husband, king Ragnar-Lodbrog, on account of her supposed peasant origin, prophesies to her husband that the child about to be born to them shall bear a dragon in (or around) his eyes, which

shall be a proof of his descent from the great Dragon-slayer; a prophecy which is fulfilled, and the nobility of Aslaug's birth thereby established. In the saga the significance of the *Schlangen-auge* is obvious: 'Wurm im Auge trägt nur andern Wurmes Tödter';[1] but here, inasmuch as the slaying of the Dragon is still to come, the allusion loses somewhat of its force.

The tree in the midst of Hunding's hut is, of course, the Branstock, which finds a mythological counterpart in the uppermost boughs of the Ash Ygdrassil, which grows up through the centre, and overshadows the roof, of Walhalla. Wagner has far more closely connected the origin of the Volsungs with Wotan, whom he makes identical with Wälse, and therefore the immediate father of the race. The sword thrust into the Branstock appears to have been, in the original legend, Odin's own sword; we find from mythology that the god was in the habit of lending his weapons, sword, spear, and occasionally his mantle and steed, to those heroes whom he especially favoured. The sword episode necessarily loses somewhat of its original force in the drama, by reason of the rapidity of the action, which makes Siegmund win the weapon which he has been promised shall aid him in his greatest need, only to find it fail him. In the legend he retains it throughout a long life,

[1] Von der Hagen, *Helden-sage*, vol. iii. p. 270.

and it is only when, having reached an advanced age, it is time that the favour of the war-god be transferred to a younger hero (a feature which frequently recurs in Northern legend), that the weapon breaks. In the Volsunga-saga the sword is called 'Gram,' which signifies 'wrath'; according to Rassmann, because it is Odin's anger alone which breaks it; the name given in the Nibelungen-lied to Siegfried's sword, 'Balmung,' he considers signifies 'destruction,' and is rather indicative of the death-dealing power of the weapon.[1] The account given by Siegmund of his and his father's wanderings in the woods, and the name by which he calls himself, Wölfing, recall the strange were-wolf episode in the story of Siegmund and Sinfiotli, a feature which is held by critics to denote the extremely early date of this part of the legend. Wagner was doubtless aware of the interesting character of this feature of the story, and unwilling to drop it altogether.

It may here be well to pause a little before following the course of the drama further, and discuss the character of the god who plays so prominent a part in Wagner's version of the Siegfried-myth, a character by no means easy of comprehension. It would, however, be unfair to charge all the obscurity and difficulty which surrounds Wotan to Wagner's account, for much is inherent in the nature of the god as primarily

[1] Rassmann, *Heldensage*, vol. i. p. 107.

conceived by the Northern folk. At the root of his being lies the element of Air: a feature in most early mythologies is the recurring Trilogy of Deities, based upon the three elements—Air, Water, and Fire; the *fourth*, Earth, seems always to have been regarded as feminine, the mother-element, and as such wooed, and dominated, now by one elementary power, now by another. To the Air, the most universally pervading of the three, the primary place in the Trilogy was assigned; and, natural and spiritual conceptions being closely bound up together, the god of the Air, at least in German mythology, assumed a double character, best understood perhaps by reference to the Greek word *pneuma*, with its double signification of *breath* and *spirit*. Thus to Northern minds Odin was not only the god of the Air, whose eyes were the Sun and Moon (from whence he also assumed at one time the character of a sun-god), but was also the embodiment of the spirit, *Gemüth*, of the Northern folk; and this national spirit being essentially a warlike one, he was also depicted as a war-god, and the sword and spear belong to him in this character. Closely connected with the more spiritual conception is also that which personified Odin in three aspects—the Trilogy of Odin, Wili, and We, the second of which regards him as the Will.[1]

The original name, Odhin, *Northern*, Wuotan,

[1] Simrock, *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, p. 168.

German, seems to have been derived from a word signifying 'penetrating movement,' which now survives in the narrower form of *waten*, to wade; so that the primary conception of this, the principal god of Northern mythology, may be summed up as the all-pervading spirit of Nature. This original idea, however, became in process of time considerably modified; certain of Odin's characteristics were, if not altogether passed over to, at least largely shared in by, other gods. Thus we early lose sight of him as the Sun-god, Baldur and Freyr having here taken his place (a point which we shall have occasion to enlarge upon later); in fact, the early conception of Odin as a *nature* god seems in great measure to have given way to the conception of Odin as a spiritual god, the embodiment of the *spirit* of the Germanic peoples. Wagner has fully grasped this idea, as is seen in the words in which Fricka reproaches Wotan for his attempt to free himself from responsibility for Siegmund's conduct. 'Was Hehres sollten Helden je wirken das ihren Göttern verwehrt, deren Gunst in ihnen nur wirkt?' 'Ihres eignen Muthes achtest du nicht.' 'Wer hauchte Menschen ihn ein?' Fricka's question can have but one answer: Odin, or Wotan, alone, was the animating spirit in those heroes; the more valiant they were, the more completely were they the instruments of his will, his *Wunschsöhne*.

It is necessary to understand this fundamental idea of mythology in order to appreciate the full difficulty of Wotan's position in the drama; he is attempting to do that which the very essence of his being renders it impossible for him to do.

And here we must remember that omnipotence was *not* a characteristic of these Northern gods; the men who wove this wonderful web recognised that there were contingencies which even their gods could not avert; behind all this glittering assembly of gods, giants, elves, and heroes brooded in the background a power dominant over gods and men alike—the power of Fate. It is this which gives so weird and mysterious a character to Northern mythology; the gradual declension of the gods, the Götterdämmerung and Weltenuntergang, are inevitable, and the gods themselves know this. They can put off the evil day by chaining Loke and his monstrous sons, the Fenris wolf and the Midgard serpent; they can, with the aid of men, protect themselves by hindering the building of the ship, Naglfar, and providing the leather for the shoe of Widar, with which he shall overcome the Fenris wolf; they can collect the spirits of the valiant slain in Walhalla, to form their army in the last struggle; but the day of the great conflict is bound to come, and they know that in that conflict many of them, and all mankind save two, must fall; but for the survivors there shall arise

out of the ruins of the old a new Heaven and a new Earth, and gods and men will alike be restored to their primæval innocency.[1]

Sundry mysterious songs in the Edda treat of the conduct of the gods, especially Odin, in face of the warnings of the coming catastrophe; and we shall find that Wagner throughout has very closely followed the mythological indications. It is true that, in mythology, the Nibelungen Hoard is in no way connected with the danger which threatens the gods, but, as we remarked before, there is no doubt that their ruin is brought about, at least partially, by their love of gold; and further, we find that the death of Baldur is one of the tokens of the coming storm; and, as we shall see, Siegfried, on whose death, in the drama, the Götterdämmerung closely follows, is undoubtedly an incarnation of the Sun-god, Odin, Baldur, or Freyr. If we, therefore, keep this mythological under-current well in view, we shall find the various parts of the puzzle fit together easily, and the unity of thought underlying the seeming confusion of this wonderful drama becomes clearly apparent.

Returning to the action of the drama, we find that the most noticeable departure from the original legend, and one which cannot be con-

[1] Simrock, *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie.* 'Weltenuntergang.'

sidered otherwise than as a dramatic gain, is the connection of the Valkyrie, Brünnhilde (or Brynhild) with the fate of the parents of the hero; in no version of the legend does she appear save as connected with Siegfried himself, and in the Volsunga-saga alone is her previous history hinted at; but without the knowledge of some such history her character in both Thidrek-saga and Nibelungen-lied is incomprehensible, and Wagner evidently recognised this when he adhered to the *Northern* rather than to the *German* version of her story. The Valkyrie, the warlike maidens of Northern mythology, are familiar figures in poetry and legend; themselves the elect of Odin, it is their mission to carry into effect his will upon the battlefields of earth, to shelter those chosen for victory, to conduct the spirits of the valiant slain to Walhalla. But they do not always appear in the same form. Nor are they always of identical origin; in fact, we meet with them under at least three distinct aspects. They may be of directly divine origin, in which form they seem to be simply a multiplication of the goddess Freyja, who not only appears occasionally as Odin's wife (and therefore identical with Fricka or Frigg), but is in this character also chooser and sharer of the slain—one-half belonging to her, and one-half to Odin; *i.e.* she is also a war-goddess. As mentioned before, Freyr and

Freyja are really *nature* gods, *Vanen-götter*, who have been adopted into the ranks of the Asas; Freyja has, in consequence, been separated from her husband-brother and her original character obscured. She is also represented as being cup-bearer to the gods, an office in which she again appears as identical with the Valkyrie, who act as cupbearers to the Einherier, the heroic dwellers in Walhalla.

Again, the Valkyrie appear as swan-maidens, in which character they are not necessarily of divine origin. In the lay known as 'Brynhild's Hell-reid' we find her saying that King Agnar had stolen the swan-skins of herself and her seven sisters, and so forced her to yield to his love and become his victory-bringer. Brynhild is therefore, apparently, a swan-maiden.

But the Valkyrie could also be of distinctly earthly origin; king's daughters who devoted themselves to warlike deeds and perpetual maidenhood might be received into their ranks. It is such who, strictly speaking, are Odin's *Wunsch-mädchen*, his adopted daughters (as Simrock renders the term), even as the dwellers in Valhalla are his *Wunch-söhne*; it is the mission of both alike to carry out All-Father's will, and in so doing to find their reward. But should one of these Valkyrie fall in love with and marry a mortal, she loses her power; this we find in the case of

one of the most famous of the sisterhood, Sigrun, daughter of King Hogni, who weds Helgi (son of Sigmund, and half-brother to Sigurd), whose story is the basis of the famous Lenore legend. Before marriage she can bestow victory on the favoured hero, but, once his wife, her power to protect him is gone.

In this lay of Sigrun we have a curious indication of another power apparently possessed by the Valkyrie, *i.e.* that of raising the dead slain in battle to life again, and thus indefinitely prolonging the struggle. Sigrun is here identified with Hilde, whose name, signifying 'War,' has become a component part of many German names; Simrock considers Hilde, who is practically the German war-goddess, to be identical with Freyja, the original Valkyrie, and also to be incarnated in Brynhild.[1]

(The feature of the dead being reawakened to life during the night after a battle also occurs in Celtic tradition, and is found in romances connected with the Grail myth; but here the agent is no longer a fair maiden, but a hideous hag, or 'Carlin.'[2] The number of the Valkyrie varies, but it is generally seven, nine, or twelve, though in the lay already alluded to, 'Brynhild's Hell-reid,' we find eight. Of these Brynhild is one of the

[1] The subject of the Valkyrie is fully treated in Simrock, *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, p. 359.

[2] Cf. *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*, p. 167. A. Nutt.

most famous, though it is not very easy to determine whether she was of really divine origin, as Wagner represents her, or of mortal birth, a Valkyrie by virtue of her virginity.

The account of her first meeting with Sigurd, and her awakening upon Hindfell, in the Volsunga-saga, is taken from the 'Lay of Sigrdrifa,' where the awakened maiden tells Sigurd how, in punishment for her having given the victory to King Agnar in opposition to Odin, who had elected the veteran Hjalm-gunnar, the god had smitten her with the sleep-thorn, deprived her of the power of bestowing victory, and condemned her to wed a mortal, though he had respected her vow to wed no man who had known fear. Here Sigrdrifa, who is also a wise-woman, a prophetess, and a teacher of runes, is evidently of unearthly origin; and in the 'Hell-reid' Brynhild distinctly identifies herself with this character, and explains how it was that King Agnar forced her to disobey Odin, namely, by the theft of her swan-shift.

But when we come to Sigurd's *second* meeting with Brynhild, we find her as the mortal maiden, the King's daughter, and Heimir's ward. This idea is also preserved in the 'Hell-reid':—

> 'Hild under helm
> The Hlymdale people,
> E'en those who knew me,
> Ever would call me.'[1]

[1] Volsunga-saga. Translated by Magnússon and Morris.

And it is in this character as the *mortal* Valkyrie, whose power depends on her maidenhood, that the *German* legend knows her. The fact seems to be that the Volsunga-saga has combined in one the stories of *two* Valkyrie, of different origin—one divine, one mortal.

The punishment awarded to the disobedient Brünnhilde undoubtedly symbolises the punishment of death. According to Grimm, the flames which surround the sleeping Valkyrie are the flames of the funeral pyre (*Scheiter-haufen*), which was customarily hung round with shields and costly hangings, and might therefore well be depicted as a *Schildburg*. The fact that the pyre was interwoven with thorns, and kindled with a thorn-branch, and the idea that death was but a slumber from which the soul awoke to new life, gave rise to the expression of the *sleep-thorn*. In another mythological legend we find the gods cast into a deep sleep by a thorn-branch, which is wielded by the god of Night.[1]

That Brynhild's awakening really typifies the visit of the hero to the other world will be shown later on.

Wotan's concluding invocation of Loge is easily understood when we remember that in the Trilogy of Northern gods, as Air lies at the basis of Odin's or Wotan's personality, so does Fire at that

[1] Rassmann, *Deutsche Heldensage*, vol. i.

of Loke or Loge. In the double character of Fire, proverbially 'a good servant, but a bad master,' we have the explanation of the double part which Loke plays in mythological legends. When the gods are ruled by his advice, he invariably misleads and betrays them; but when, driven to desperation, they force him by threats to find a way out of the *impasse* he himself has brought about, he is always equal to the occasion.

On the whole, the character assigned to Loke is decidedly evil; and in the fact that he and the monsters who owe their birth to him are the real elements of danger to gods and men alike, and it is their breaking their bonds which will bring about the final catastrophe of the Götterdämmerung, we find a testimony to the antiquity of the belief that the world will finally be destroyed by the agency of Fire.

CHAPTER V

Siegfried

ARGUMENT

Siegfried, the son of Siegmund and Sieglinde, has been brought up in the forest by the dwarf Mime, who intends to use Siegfried as his instrument in recovering for him the Nibelung Hoard and Ring. The great obstacle in the way of his carrying out his plan is his failure to forge a suitable weapon, Siegfried at once breaking in pieces every sword Mime can forge. Indignant at these repeated failures, Siegfried at last wrings from Mime the confession that his mother, dying, had intrusted him with the fragments of Nothung, Siegmund's sword, and Siegfried bids him weld these fragments anew; Mime knows himself to be unequal to the task, and yet knows that no other weapon will serve for the slaying of Fafnir.

Wotan, in the guise of the Wanderer, appears to Mime; and in a riddling contest, in which each stakes his head on the successful solving of three questions, forces from Mime the confession of his failure, and then reveals to him that Nothung can only be forged anew by one to whom fear is unknown.

On Siegfried's return, Mime admits his inability to fulfil the task, and bids the lad attempt it himself, which he does with success. Mime, having vainly endeavoured to extort a confession of fear from Siegfried, promises to lead him to Fafnir, in whose presence he will surely learn it.

Alberich, who watches Fafnir's retreat in the hope of regaining the Ring himself, is warned by Wotan (the Wanderer) of Mime's intention of winning the Hoard through the instrumentality of Siegfried, and both endeavour, but vainly, to put Fafnir on his guard.

Siegfried, led by Mime to the neighbourhood of the dragon's cave, attempts to imitate the song of the birds, and awakens

Fafnir by his horn; but, far from feeling fear at the monster's appearance, he is only roused to wrath by his threats, and attacks him, finally piercing him to the heart with Nothung. His hand being scorched by the fiery blood of the dragon, the lad places it to his lips to cool it; and as soon as he tastes the blood, he understands the song of a bird, warning him to take possession both of Ring and Tarn-helmet, and to be on his guard against Mime's treachery.

Consequently, when Mime approaches him with flattering words, Siegfried detects the thought beneath; and on the dwarf offering him a poisoned drink, he slays him and casts his body into the cave, the entrance to which he closes with the corpse of the dragon. Resting under a tree, the bird sings of Brünnhilde the sleeping Valkyrie, who can only be awakened from her fire-girdled slumber by one who knows no fear; Siegfried announces that he has never learned that lesson, and bids the bird lead him to Brünnhilde.

Wotan awakes the goddess Erda to tell her that her wisdom is now baffled, for his *will* accepts what her knowledge foretold. The Ring has been won by Siegfried, and Brünnhilde, the daughter of Wotan and Erda, shall work out its curse, and, having learned *to know*, shall carry through the deed which shall free the world. There is no further need for Erda's wisdom, and Wotan bids her to everlasting slumber.

Siegfried, led by the bird, arrives at the foot of Brünnhilde's mountain, where he is confronted by the Wanderer, who would bar the way with his spear; Siegfried hews the weapon asunder with his sword, and makes his way through the flames to the summit of the mountain, where he finds the Valkyrie sleeping under a fir-tree. He removes her helmet, and cuts off her corslet with Nothung, and, at the sight of the first woman he has ever seen, feels at last the touch of fear. Brünnhilde, awakened by Siegfried's kiss, at first shrinks in terror from her fate; then, recognising the hero as the son of Siegmund, whose coming she had herself foretold, confesses her love, and yields in ecstasy to his embrace.

Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula—Siegfried's parentage and upbringing—Mimir and Regin—The Vafthrudnersmal—Wotan as the Wanderer—The fight with the Dragon—

The Gnita-Heide—The Salmon of Wisdom—Siegfried's invulnerability—The Vegtamskvida—The awakening of Brünnhilde—Her various dwellings—Connection with the Under-world—Survival of the myth.

THE first day of the drama closed amid the lurid surroundings of flame, defeat, and death; the second day opens in the shades of the woodland sanctuary where Sieglinde sought refuge, and where the orphan child of herself and Siegmund has been brought up under the care of the dwarf Mime, and in total ignorance of his parentage. And here we find that Wagner, who has hitherto followed closely the course of the legend as presented in the Volsunga-saga, departs from this version of the story, and bases his drama on the far less well-known Thidrek-saga.

We may accept the fact that dramatic considerations had doubtless much to do with this change of authority; but that here, as elsewhere, Wagner's instinct was a true one, and led him to select out of various conflicting versions that one which, though not oldest in form, was really most closely in accord with primitive tradition, seems to be more than probable.

Among the folk-tales current in the various branches of the great Aryan family, we find a certain sequence of incident recurring, now in connection with one hero, now with another, marking all these tales, whatever their nation-

ality, with a certain unmistakable likeness the one to the other, and rendering it practically certain that they are all variants of one original tradition. This special sequence of incident J. G. von Hahn, in his *Sagwissenschaftliche Studien*, designated as the *Arische Aussetzungs-und-Rück-kehr Formel* (Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula); and he there collected fourteen stories belonging to various branches of the Aryan race, each of which conformed with more or less exactness to the prescribed formula. Of these, besides the legend we are considering, it will be sufficient here to mention two of the best known, the incidents of which will readily recur to the mind of the reader: *i.e.*, in Greek legend, Perseus; in Roman, Romulus and Remus.

To the list given by J. G. von Hahn, Mr. Alfred Nutt, in an article on the subject in the *Folk-Lore Record*, vol. iv., added eight examples drawn from Celtic sources (to these Celtic variants we will return later on). It seems, therefore, practically certain that, whatever the original signification of the formula, or whatever the cause which led to the first moulding of the legend into such a shape, the sequence of incident is of extreme antiquity; and the nations who possess the story, by whatever name they may elect to call its hero, really hold it as a part of their original Aryan inheritance.

Mr. Nutt, in his *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail* (chap. vi.), tabulates this formula as follows:—

I. Hero born
  (*a*) Out of wedlock.
  (*b*) Posthumously.
  (*c*) Supernaturally.
  (*d*) One of twins.

II. Mother, princess residing in her own country.

III. Father.
  (*a*) God
  (*b*) Hero } from afar.

IV. Tokens and warning of hero's future greatness.

V. He is in consequence driven forth from home.

VI. *Is suckled by wild beasts.*

VII. *Is brought up by a childless couple,* or shepherd, or widow.

VIII. *Is of passionate and violent disposition.*

IX. *Seeks service in foreign lands.*
  (*a*) *Attacks and slays monsters.*
  (*b*) *Acquires supernatural knowledge through eating a fish or other magic animal.*

X. Returns to his own country, retreats, and again returns.

XI. Overcomes his enemies, frees his mother, seats himself on the throne.

Now, if we take the account of Siegfried's birth and upbringing as given in the Thidrek-saga, we cannot fail to be struck by its close conformity to the recognised sequence; the incidents printed in italics all occur unmistakably in this version, while those lacking here, though easily supplied from other sources, yet exist in a less simple and direct form than in the Thidrek-saga. The one point in which the account of the Thidrek-saga has been noticeably modified by later tradition is that of the hero's parentage and birth, which not only does not conform strictly to the formula, but shows evident traces of romantic influence; the falsely accused wife is a familiar figure in mediæval tales, but is too late in colouring to fit in well with the incidents of Siegfried's career, which belong to Heroic Legend rather than to Märchen. Nevertheless, even here the Thidrek-saga has preserved a very curious feature in the glass casket in which the infant is borne away by the stream, which is closely paralleled by the chest in which Perseus, the Greek formula hero, and his mother Danae are carried away by the sea. (There are other points of special agreement between Perseus and Siegfried, *e.g.* the interest taken by the gods in the career of the hero, which extends to their arming him with their own weapons; as we noted before, *Gram* is Odin's own sword.)

Taking, therefore, incidents VI. to IX. (*b*) in-

clusive, as represented in the Thidrek-saga, we find the account given by the Volsunga-saga closely in accord with I. (*b*), II., and III. (*b*), while it also conforms to IV. in Hjalprek's prophecy of the future greatness of the Volsung child, when the new-born infant is brought before him. Incidents X. and XI. do not figure prominently in the Volsunga-saga, but they are nevertheless not altogether missing; Sigurd slays the sons of Hunding and regains his father's kingdom, a point emphasised by Rassmann, who holds that the favour shown by Odin to the Volsungs was contingent on their retaining possession of the kingdom originally given by the god to Sigi.

Incident V. appears in the Siegfrieds-lied, where King Sigmund expels his son from his kingdom on account of his violent and turbulent nature; it is here dependent rather on VIII. than on IV., but the survival is significant.

It will therefore be found, taking one version with another, that in Siegfried we have a remarkably perfect conformity to the requirements of the formula, and that he may be considered not only as *the* Teutonic hero, *par excellence*, but also as a typical Aryan hero.

Who Siegfried's mother really was, in the original legend, it is not very easy now to discover; that his father was a hero of semi-divine origin named Sigmund, seems tolerably certain;

but, curiously enough, here all the variations are in the identity of the mother. The princess Hjordis, as noted above, conforms most closely to the recognised formula, and with this would agree the Danish Helden-lieder which represent Siwart or Sivord (Sigurd) as the son of a widow, therein agreeing closely with other tales of this family.

In spite, however, of the later date of the Thidrek-saga as regards Siegfried's parentage, that it not only represents more fully the original tradition of the hero's youth, but also the tradition lying at the root of the Volsunga-saga, becomes evident when we examine the latter closely. For here, too, the smith appears as Sigurd's foster-father, a quite unnecessary character, since Sigurd has been brought up at the court of his mother's husband, who treats him in all respects as his own son. The circumstances of the case do not require Regin at all; he is evidently a survival of a state of things where he *was* necessary, and this we find in the Thidrek-saga.

Again, when Fafnir asks Sigurd of his name and parentage, the hero replies, 'Unknown to men is my kin. I am called a noble beast: neither father have I, nor mother.' The refusal to tell his name may of course be accounted for on other grounds, but the assertion that he has 'neither father nor mother' seems to point to an

account of Sigurd's parentage other than that represented by the Volsunga-saga, and anterior to that version.[1]

The name of the smith who is Siegfried's master will be seen to vary. *Mimir* plays a somewhat important part in the Thidrek-saga; he is also the master of the famous Wieland, the smith, who is removed by his father from Mimir's care to escape the persecutions of Siegfried, who ill-treats both his fellow-pupils and Mimir's serving-men. The fact that the compiler of the Thidrek-saga utilised both German and Northern tradition has already been noted, and it seems probable that Mimir, or Mime, was the original *German* name of the smith, and that he changed the name of the dragon to Regin, in order to preserve also the *Northern* name of the more famous brother. Rassmann considers that Regin is derived from Regino, *Rath-geber*, and it is possible that the name was changed in order to denote the wisdom and cunning with which the smith was gifted.

The incident of the Bear, introduced here by Wagner, has evidently been transferred from the Nibelungen-lied, where Siegfried, during the fatal hunt, captures a bear and lets it loose among the serving-men, a practical joke better befitting the boy than the man.

[1] Volsunga-saga, Morris and Magnússon's translation, chap. xviii.

In the account of the forging of the sword Wagner has again returned to the Volsunga-saga, which alone knows of the fragments of the father's sword. In the Thidrek-saga it is a sword of Mimir's own forging; nor, in the Northern version, does the smith find the task in any sort beyond his power. The German tradition, which, on the whole, seems to regard Thidrek, or Dietrich, as a greater hero than Siegfried, also knows a sword which is a more potent weapon than Gram; this is Mimung, the sword of Witig or Widga, the son of Wieland the smith, and one of Dietrich's companions. Wieland forged this blade and gave it the name of Mimung (evidently in remembrance of his old master, Mimir), and Siegfried knows and dreads its power. In the single combat between Siegfried and Dietrich, the former exacts an oath from the hero of Bern that he is not wielding Mimung, which Dietrich, who has in truth borrowed the sword from Witig, evades by a ruse, and succeeds in overcoming Siegfried. Of course, in the Thidrek-saga, Gram, which is of Mimir's own forging, would hardly have the miraculous power possessed by a weapon which, in the Volsunga-saga, is evidently divine.[1]

In the interview between Mime and Wotan,

[1] Rydberg's theory of the origin of the Hoard, given at the conclusion of the studies on the 'Ring,' goes far to explain the superiority of Mimung.

Wagner has clearly been influenced by the Eddaic poem known as the 'Vafthrudnersmal,' where Odin holds a similar competition with the all-knowing giant, Vafthrudner. The question which the latter cannot answer, and by failing to do so forfeits his head to Odin, is, 'What did Odin say in the ear of his son as he mounted the funeral pyre?' the son being Baldur, and the whole incident having reference to the overshadowing 'Götterdämmerung.' These riddling competitions dealing with obscure questions of Fate, the divine government of the world, etc., seem to have been favourite subjects for mediæval poetry. We have a remarkable example in the poem of the Wartburg-Krieg.[1]

Odin, as the Wanderer, is well known in Northern mythology. In this character the Vafthrudnersmal knows him as Gangradr; in the Vegtamskvida, a poem to which we shall have occasion to refer later on, he calls himself Vegtam; but Gangradr, which seems to signify a tireless wanderer, is the better-known name. His outward presentment is that of an old man, one-eyed, with flowing hair and beard, wrapped in a blue cloak, with a broad-leaved hat drawn over his forehead.

The feature of the principal god visiting the earth, sometimes alone, sometimes with one or two companions, is of very frequent occurrence in all

[1] Simrock, *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, p. 78.

mythologies; and we find a survival of the belief in the sometimes childish, yet often quaint and beautiful, mediæval legends of the wanderings of our Lord with one or two of His Apostles, most frequently with S. Peter alone.

Siegfried's encounter with the dragon, which follows here directly on the forging of the sword, takes place, as in the Thidrek-saga, in the woodland, and not on the desolate heath of the Northern saga. Rassmann refers the name of this latter, the Gnita-heide, to the Anglo-Saxon root *gnîtan*, to shine, and connects it with the Glas-berg, where, as we shall see, according to some versions of the legend, Brynhild had her dwelling; and understands both alike to signify the under-world, which is not always a place of darkness, but sometimes of light and joy.[1]

But the home of the departed spirits is often surrounded by thick woods and forests, and in these woods dwell fearful serpents and unearthly monsters, which must be confronted by the hero who would penetrate beyond the borders; and great treasures of gold are hidden in the under-world. So it may be that these two accounts of the dragon's home are not really, as they seem at first sight, contradictory the one of the other, but are originally part of the same tradition, the dragon symbolising the power of darkness. It

[1] Rassmann, *Heldensage*, vol. i. p. 152.

seems possible, too, that in the original legend the dragon guarded the maiden; as it is, we find Sigurd guided to Brynhild as a direct consequence of the death of the monster, a feature which Wagner has retained.

Morris, in his version of the legend, renders Gnitaheide as the Glittering Heath, but seems to interpret the name as having reference to the Hoard, thereby obscuring the 'other-world' significance of the story.

The incident of Siegfried's obtaining the power of understanding the song of the birds by eating a part of the dragon's flesh, or tasting the blood, is, as reference to the formula given above will show, an integral part of the Aryan tradition. We meet it in other countries in slightly varying forms: in Celtic tradition we find it in the story of Finn and the Salmon of Wisdom; in Kymric in that of Gwion and the Caldron of Inspiration.[1] In these two instances, the effect produced is much greater, being the gift of all wisdom; whereas, in the Siegfried myth, it is only the power of understanding the song of the birds.

The feature of the dragon's blood conferring invulnerability on Siegfried could scarcely be retained in the drama, and Wagner has therefore replaced it by Brünnhilde's spells. There seems

[1] A. Nutt, *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*, pp. 209-10.

every reason to believe that it formed part of the original tradition; every distinctively German version has retained the *fact* of Siegfried's inability to be wounded save in one place, though they differ slightly as to the means by which this was brought about; attributing it sometimes to the blood of the dragon, as in the Thidrek-saga and Nibelungen-lied, sometimes to the horny hide of the monster, which melts in the fire, as in the Siegfrieds-lied. The Volsunga-saga, alone, totally omits the incident, and that it departs from the original tradition in doing so will be shown when we discuss the manner of the hero's death.

Wagner, here, suddenly interrupts the progress of the legend to introduce an interview between Wotan and the Wala, Erda, the outline of which has undoubtedly been suggested by the Eddaic poem above referred to, the Vegtamskvida. This poem is closely connected with another, 'Odin's Rabenzauber,' which recounts the dismay of the gods at the portents foreboding Baldur's death and the coming Götterdämmerung. Odin, while the other gods sit in council, mounts his horse, Sleipnir, and rides to Niflheim, where he wakes the dead Wala, the prophetess, from her last slumber, and, hiding his identity under the name of Vegtam, forces her to answer the questions he puts to her, But from her dark sayings he wins no comfort, and the two finally reproach each other. 'Du bist

nicht Vegtam, Odin bist du, der Allerschaffer, while Odin retorts—

> 'Du bist keine Vala, kein wissendes Weib,
> Vielmehr bist du dreier Thursen Mutter'—[1]

stanzas of which the words in the drama appear to be a reminiscence. No such connection as that indicated by Wagner appears to have really existed between Odin and the Wala, but Northern mythology relates how the god wins and wooes by a ruse the maiden Rinda (by whom, it has been foretold, he shall have a son who shall avenge the death of Baldur),[2] and *Rinda* has been interpreted as signifying the earth, under her winter and frostbound aspect. Here, for the first time, Wotan reveals himself distinctly as 'the Will,' an aspect which, as before pointed out, is in no sense alien to his original conception, but is, in fact, included in it.

This presentation of Wotan as the Will is, however, interpreted by Wagner rather in accordance with Schopenhauer's philosophy, than as illustrative of the mythological conception, and it is very interesting to remark with what curious facility

[1] 'No waywise (Vegtam) art thou, as I took thee to be, but thou art Woden, the ancient sire.'
'No Sibyl art thou, nor wise-woman, but thou art the mother of three monsters.'
Cf. *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i., where the poem is given under the name of 'Balder's Doom.'

[2] Simrock, *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, p. 78.

this attitude of the god towards the approaching catastrophe, as portrayed in the Eddaic poems, lent itself to this philosophical interpretation. The Götterdämmerung, the apparent destruction of the gods, is in reality their salvation; the survivors alike of gods and men will arise from the general wreck freed from the haunting fear of their deadly enemies, purified from their sins, and restored to a condition of innocency. The attitude of the gods towards the coming catastrophe, of which they also foresee the ultimate issues, is therefore not merely passive and fatalistic, but one of willing acceptance of a necessary discipline, *i.e. the renunciation of the will to live*; and this scene between Wotan and Erda is to be understood as the god's acceptance and enunciation of this principle.

We now approach what is really the central incident of the whole drama, and one which displays clearly the originally mythic character of the hero, the awakening of Brünnhilde by Siegfried.

The 'Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula,' as quoted above, makes no special mention of this incident, but the freeing of a maiden from peril, or death, under circumstances of danger and difficulty, is very frequently one of the hero's achievements, and may perhaps be included under the heading of IX. (*a*). The special presentment of the Vol-

sunga-saga may be taken as due to a myth connected with the god Freyr and his wooing of Gerda, in which myth he appears as a sun-, rather than a spring-god. In the original form of the legend, Freyr himself rides through the Waberlohe and the thorn-hedge which surround Gerda's dwelling, to win his bride; in the later form of the story he sends his servant, Skirnir, lending him sword and steed for the purpose; and these two versions have evidently been united in the Volsunga-saga, where Sigurd rides the flames *twice*, once for himself and once for Gunnar.[1]

The myth is originally a nature-myth, typifying the awakening of the earth from her winter sleep by the vivifying power of the sun; but it early gained a more extended and spiritual significance as relating the visit of the hero to the other-world, the greatest achievement alike of gods and of men.

Grimm's identification of the 'Waberlohe' with the flames of the funeral pyre has met with general acceptance among scholars; and when we examine the various dwellings which tradition assigns to the heroine of the legend, comparing them with the dwellings of the other-world, we shall find that in every instance the indications of the Volsunga-saga are borne out, and that there is a general consensus of testimony to the effect that Siegfried's visit to Sigrdrifa, or Brünnhilde, really represents

[1] Simrock, p. 61.

a visit of the hero to the abode of the dead, the other-world. Thus in the Thidrek-saga Brynhild dwells in a castle named Segard (which appears to indicate that it was at least on the coast, if not on an island), the doors of which Siegfried bursts open by force, slaying all who would oppose him. This dwelling of Brynhild's is either in or near Bertangaland, which is generally identified as Britain. With this closely agrees the Nibelungen-lied, which represents the princess as ruling over *Island* and dwelling in the castle of Isenstein on the sea-shore. (Rassmann identifies *Island* as derived from Isa, a goddess of the under-world, probably the same as Holda, and *not* as Iceland.)

In the folk-songs current in Denmark and the Färöe Isles, Brynhild is represented as dwelling on the *Glasberg*, up the glittering sides of which none but Sigurd can ride.

Now, the Glasberg is well known to students of German folk-lore as the abode of departed spirits, *i.e.* the other-world, and, as such, connected with the mountain in which Holda, who is goddess of the dead, lives. It is no abode of terror, but of rest and bliss; though the dwellers in it would often gladly return to this world, but are unable of themselves to do so. Rassmann, who treats this subject fully in his *Heldensage* (vol. i. pp. 151 *et seq.*), identifies the Glasberg alike with the Gnita-heide, as mentioned above,

and with the island Glid, mentioned in Anglo-Saxon Chronicles as the abode of departed spirits, the original root signifying *glanz, freude, wonne.*

That the souls of the blessed dead rested in an island in the Western seas was a very general belief in early times, and is very familiar to us through the Arthurian legend, which represents the departed king as dwelling in Avalon, the Welsh equivalent for the Irish *Tir na n, og,* 'the land beyond the waves,' the Celtic Paradise.[1] Between Avalon and Britain there existed, as we find from the Grail legends, an undoubted, though not altogether clear, connection; and later on, Avalon became identified with *Glastonbury,* though why it did so it is not easy to decide. The etymology of Glastonbury seems to be still a matter of uncertainty; and though experts incline apparently more to a Celtic than to a Saxon source, it does not seem impossible that there is a connection between the Glasberg and Glastonbury, and that the identification of the latter with Avalon was due to some tradition originally connected with the place.[2] In any case Brynhild's residence on the Glasberg, and on an island in at

[1] In this connection Mr. Alfred Nutt's essay on 'The Happy Other-world' (*The Voyage of Bran,* by Kuno Meyer and A. Nutt) will be found interesting.

[2] On this point, see *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail,* chapter viii.

least close proximity to Britain, leaves little doubt as to the nature of her home.

The castle, too, in which the Thidrek-saga and Nibelungen-lied place her is undoubtedly an under-world dwelling; the manner in which Siegfried forces his entrance in the first-named version clearly indicates this. The doors are the portals of Hades, which the hero must either burst by main force, or spring his steed over (as Hermodur does when he rides to Hel to bring Baldur back). At first the surroundings of Hel seem to have been a high hedge or thicket of thorns, but eventually the under-world dwelling became a fortress, guarded, as fortresses are on earth, with towers and iron-bound portals. This magic castle, typical of the other-world, appears frequently in the Grail Romances, and a visit to such a castle is among the achievements ordinarily ascribed to Gawain, one of the oldest heroes of this cycle.[1]

In the most popular form in which the legend has descended to us, the folk-tale of 'The Sleeping Beauty,' the other-world signification of the original tale has become greatly obscured; the flame which surrounds Gerda and Sigrdrifa has vanished, and the thorn-hedge, once one with the flame, alone remains, and has blossomed into a thicket of roses. The sleep-thorn has become the

[1] On this point, see *Studies of the Legend on the Holy Grail*, chapter vii.

spindle, and the maiden no longer slumbers alone, but surrounded by all her courtiers. We have changed the ending, too, and, instead of the fateful separation of hero and heroine, only to be reunited amid the flames of the funeral pyre, in the time-honoured language of fairy-tale, they 'live happy ever after.'

'For o'er the hills and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Across the night, beyond the day,
Thro' all the world she followed him.

CHAPTER VI

Götterdämmerung

ARGUMENT

THE drama opens with a scene between the three Norns, who indicate by their dark prophecies, and the breaking of the cord they weave, the fate of the hero, and the approaching fall of Walhalla.

Siegfried leaves Brünnhilde, having pledged himself to her, and given her the Ring as a love-token, and arrives at the hall of the Gibichungs, Gunther and Gutrune, with their half-brother Hagen, who is really son to Alberich.

Hagen, well aware of the task which his father has imposed upon him of regaining the Ring, urges Gunther and Gutrune to marriage, telling them that in Brünnhilde and Siegfried they will find their fitting mates.

On Siegfried's arrival, Gutrune, acting under Hagen's advice, presents him with a magic drink, the effect of which is not only to inspire him with a sudden passion for the Gibichung princess, but to make him entirely forget Brünnhilde; whom he offers to assist Gunther in winning as his wife, claiming the hand of Gutrune as his reward, and the two heroes swear an oath of blood-brotherhood.

Brünnhilde, awaiting the return of Siegfried, is visited by the Valkyrie, Waltraute, who tells her of the dismay in Walhalla, caused by Wotan's acceptance of the coming Götterdämmerung, and refusal to make any effort to avert it. Nothing can save the gods except the return of the fatal Ring to its original guardians, the Rhine Maidens. Brünnhilde, who has now fully accepted the fate Wotan has prepared for her, and accounts Siegfried's love a greater treasure than her lost divinity, refuses to part with the Ring, Siegfried's love-token,

and Waltraute leaves her in indignation. Siegfried, in the shape of Gunther, which he has assumed by means of the Tarn-helm, penetrates again through the flame to Brünnhilde, and, in spite of her struggles, forces the Ring from her, and compels her to accept him as her husband, keeping faith with Gunther by placing the sword, Nothung, between them.

In the mist of the morning, Siegfried and Gunther change places, and Brünnhilde follows the latter to the hall of the Gibichungs, where she is met by Siegfried and Gutrune. She at once accuses Siegfried of having betrayed both herself and Gunther, and he swears his innocence on Hagen's spear. Hagen offers to avenge Brünnhilde, and Siegfried's death is determined upon.

A hunting-party is arranged, and Siegfried, who has become separated from the others, is confronted by the three Rhine Maidens, who entreat him to give them back the Ring, and on his refusal foretell that he will die that day. Siegfried refuses to give them through fear what he would not yield freely, and the maidens vanish.

Siegfried is joined by the others, and during the following meal, under the influence of a drink given by Hagen, he relates the story of his slaying the dragon and winning Brünnhilde. Two ravens fly out of the thicket behind him, and Siegfried, turning to look at them, is struck to the heart by Hagen.

The body is borne to the hall, where Hagen claims the Ring as his property, both as avenger of perjury and heir to the rightful owner, Alberich, but is opposed by Gunther. The two fight, and Gunther falls.

At Brünnhilde's command a funeral pyre is raised on which the body of Siegfried is laid, and Brünnhilde, after proclaiming love alone, not gold nor glory, to be the enduring good, mounts her horse, Grane, and spurs it into the flames.

The waves of the Rhine rise, and the maidens, summoned by Brünnhilde's last words, draw the Ring from Siegfried's hand and disappear into the waves, dragging with them Hagen, who has endeavoured to frustrate them. A glow in the Northern sky tells of the fall of Walhalla and the 'twilight of the gods.'

The Norns: their original signification—Survival in tradition and fairy-tale—The Voluspa—Grane—Gunther and the original Niblungs—The deception of Brünnhilde—Swan-

hild—The Tarn-helm—Nature of the relations between Brünnhilde and Siegfried—The cause of Siegfried's murder—The version of the Nibelungen-lied—Original scene of the murder—Siegfried's identification with Baldur—Hagen: his connection with the Treasure—Alberich—König Ornit—Death of Brünnhilde—The drama in connection with the original legend.

The scene of the awakening of Brünnhilde, fully discussed in our last chapter, forms the central point of the drama; from this moment the shadow of impending fate looms darker and more imminent, and the tragedy—for such it now unmistakably becomes—moves rapidly to its close. And here we cannot but feel that the final stages in the hero's career suffer considerably by the compression necessary to bring them within the limits of time available for the drama. As in the case of Siegmund, so in that of his son, the character of the hero is necessarily and unfavourably affected by this compression; and as a sympathetic and picturesque presentment of the concluding scenes, the drama is distinctly inferior to either the Volsunga-saga or the Nibelungen-lied, which, in both instances, touch their highest point of excellence in their account of the hero's death and the circumstances which precede it.

With the opening of the drama we find ourselves once more in the world of mythology, in the company of the Three Norns, the Northern Fates. These three sisters, originally of divine origin,

appear to have been anterior to the gods, and to have at first ruled their fate, even as later they weave and rule the fates of men. It is their task to tend Ygdrassil, the world-ash, and to refresh it with water from Urd's spring: Urd, or Wurd, being the name of the eldest Norn; the others, Verdandi and Skuld; the three signifying the Past, the Present, and the Future. Simrock considers that originally all three sisters were named *Wurd*, and that we have a reminiscence of this in Macbeth's 'weird sisters.'

Be this as it may, it is not difficult to find traces of the widespread nature of the belief in the Norns, and their connection with the affairs of men; a belief which survives to our day under a variety of more or less easily penetrated disguises.

The good fortune which it was in their power to bestow upon mortals, gradually, as the Christian faith gained ground in the North, and the mythical nature of the sisters became obscured, took the form of religious benefactions; throughout Germany, in Belgium, Switzerland, and further north, we find a constantly recurring triad of sisters, generally dignified with the prefix of Saint, whose names, varying in different localities, can yet without much difficulty be connected with one or another of the fateful sisters, and whom students of mythology identify as being in reality Christianised versions of the Three Norns.

And if they survive in Christian tradition, they do so, much more unmistakably, in folk-lore and Märchen. Identical with the *Tria Fata* of the Celts, they have, through their name, become confused with the fairies; and first in their own form, then as fairies, we find them attendants on the cradles of heroes; foretelling, for the most part, good fortune, marred, however, by the prophecy of the last Norn, who is generally a herald of evil.

Thus, in the Nornagest-saga, the youngest sister foretells that the infant shall only live as long as the taper burning beside the cradle shall last; the eldest sister extinguishes the light and bids the mother guard it carefully; and it is only as an aged man of over three hundred years that, at the court of King Olaf Tryggvason, Nornagest lights the taper and expires with the expiring flame.[1]

So when the Danish king Fridleif bare his new-born son to the temple of the Norns, the youngest sister cursed the child with the passion of avarice, thus marring the gifts bestowed upon him by her sisters. How, as fairies, they appear in the tale of the 'Sleeping Beauty,' the close connection of which with our legend has already been remarked, every reader will remember.

We may remark here that the number of the Norns, as of the Valkyrie, varies; originally and

[1] *Nornagest-saga*, *Altdeutsche und Altdnordische Heldensagen*, vol. iii., Von der Hagen.

generally three, they sometimes appear as seven, nine, or twelve.

The fact that they are undoubtedly connected by their name *fata* with fairies, and that their ordinary home is by Urd's spring, at the root of the ash, Ygdrassil, seems to show that there may also be a connection between the Norns and the water fairies who are met by the side of a fountain or stream, and in so many traditions are wedded to mortals.[1]

In the drama the Norns appear in their original character, as interested in the fate of the gods, and the various indications of the approaching catastrophe are founded on mythological sources, most of which have been already referred to. The Eddaic poem, the Voluspa, which relates at length the signs and portents heralding the Götterdämmerung, ends each verse with the mysterious question, 'Wisst Ihr was das bedeutet?' Wagner seems to have had this in his mind when he made each Norn conclude her speech with a similar question.[2]

[1] For full information as to the Norns *vide* Simrock's *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, where the question of the Götterdämmerung, and the portents heralding it, is also fully treated.

[2] An English translation of the poem is given in *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*; there the form of the question is given as, 'Know ye yet or what?'—a more literal rendering than the German. The latter has been retained in the text as being the version used by Wagner.

After the mysterious scene with the Norns, which prepares our minds for the tragical development of the story, the thread of the action is resumed with the parting between Siegfried and Brünnhilde, and the latter's gift of her horse, Grane, to the hero. The runes, with which the awakened Valkyrie in the legend instructs the hero, may be found in the 'lay of Sigrdrifa,' which has been incorporated in chapters xx. and xxi. of the Volsunga-saga.[1] In this latter chapter, Sigrdrifa (or Brynhild) significantly warns Sigurd, 'Good it were that hate fell not on thee from those of thy wife's house.'

In making the horse, Grane, the gift of Brünnhilde, Wagner has followed the Thidrek-saga; though there Siegfried has been told by Mimir to ask for the steed, and apparently visits Brynhild for that purpose. In the Volsunga-saga the horse, though ostensibly the gift of King Hjalprek, ought rather to be considered that of Odin, who directs Sigurd in his choice, and tells him that Grane is of the kin of Sleipnir, Odin's eight-legged steed. Wagner evidently intends us to consider the gift of the Valkyrie as of unearthly origin, and there is no doubt that Sigurd's horse *is* a divine steed.

Simrock connects the name *Grani* (a name

[1] Translated in Morris and Magnússon's edition of the Volsunga-saga.

by which Odin himself is occasionally designated) with *grane*, the old German word for the hair of the beard; and according to him the beard of the god and the mane of the horse would alike typify the sun-rays, and would again be connected with the golden corn or granum, the fruit of the sun.[1] Regarded in this aspect, Grani (or Grane) becomes at once the horse of the sun-god, and, as such, identical with Freyr's steed which penetrates the 'Waberlohe' surrounding Gerda's dwelling. There seems little doubt that this was the real object of Odin's gift—*i.e.* to enable the hero to reach the sleeping Valkyrie; and the fact that Wagner places the gift of the horse *after* the awakening of Brünnhilde is utterly destructive of the origin and meaning of this really characteristic feature of the story.

We now approach one of the most important parts of the saga, and that part which, as noted in the introductory chapter, has been seriously affected and modified by historical influence. In no part of the drama has the enforced compression of the action told more severely upon the legend, which has been here stripped bare of all that lends grace and dignity to the story, and appears a mere skeleton of itself.

The father of the royal house, whose kingdom is on the banks of the Rhine, is here Gibich, a name

[1] Simrock, *Deutschen Mythologie*, pp. 213 *et seq.*

which seems to be in root identical with Giuki in the Volsunga-saga, and which Simrock tells us was occasionally borne by Odin; it may therefore indicate the originally unearthly nature of these kings.

There seems strong reason to believe that if we could reconstruct the original form of the legend we should find these characters, into whose power the hero falls, and who force him to a course of action which finally brings about his death at their hands, to be of as mythic an origin as Siegfried himself, symbolising a power of darkness, as he does of light; but the introduction of the historical element into the legend, and the identification of these kings with rulers of the Burgundian Rhine kingdom, has completely obscured the original legend. Gunther or Gunnar, in particular, has probably been euhemerised out of all likeness to his mythical self, and *Hagen* alone bears evident traces of an other than mortal origin.

An interesting question is, Are Gunther and his brothers to be considered as Nibelungs or not? The indications of the legend are somewhat confused, and, as noted earlier, it would seem that the name of Nibelung (or Niflung) is rather dependent on the possession of the Treasure; only in the Thidrek-saga are these kings Nibelungs throughout. That they are evil powers is certain,

and it is generally admitted that it is really through his possession of the fatal Treasure that the hero falls under their influence; but the question is, Is this influence due to their previous connection with the Treasure, or merely to the action of the curse on the hero, independent of any such connection on their part? The strongest argument for holding the first of these two alternatives to be the truth is the character of Hagen, whose opposition to the hero evidently lies at the very root of his being, and is part of the original *stoff* of the legend; but it is not by any means certain that Hagen *is* one of the Gibichungs or Giukings at all. His connection with Gunther is, as we shall see, very variable, and it may be that it is he, and not Gunther, who really represents the original Rhine-king of the legend, whether that king were a Nibelung or not.

If we refer to the discussion of the original source of the gold in chapter iii. we shall find that the representatives of the Nibelungs were a father and two (or perhaps three) sons; and the collection of the Treasure due, apparently, to the skill or cunning of the father. With this outline, at the first glance, the family of the Rhine-kings seems to agree, *i.e.* there is a father and three sons—Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher, in the distinctively German versions; Gunnar, Hogni (or

Hagen), and Guttorm in the Northern. In the Thidrek-saga Hagen is a half-brother, thus converting the evidently original number into four; in the Nibelungen-lied he is simply Gunther's 'man.' But, though at first sight these versions appear to agree, there are two important modifications: first, the father of the Rhine-kings is a mere lay-figure, and certainly could not be compared with Hreidmar, of the earlier group; then, and more important, these Rhine-kings have always a sister who plays a very leading, eventually *the* leading, part in the development of the story, and who certainly appears to be of as mythical an origin as her rival, Brynhild. The witch-mother, who is so prominent a figure in the Volsunga-saga, is in all probability merely a duplication of the sister, whose name, Grimhild, she has taken; it seems most likely that in the original legend it was the maiden herself who was possessed of magical powers and used them to win the love of the hero. The compiler of the Volsunga-saga seems to have passed over the more unamiable traits of the daughter's character to the mother, as throughout his sympathies are evidently with Gudrun and Hogni, and he is bent on making out as good a case for them as he can; though the underlying fierceness of the original character of Sigurd's wife breaks through at the end with her murder of her sons.

The gradual development and modifications which the character of Kriemhild (or Gudrun) has undergone is one of the most important and interesting features of the legend as a whole. She is, of course, really a far more important character than Brynhild; but inasmuch as we are now only considering the Nibelungen myth in connection with its presentment in the Wagnerian Drama, it would be beside the mark to enter upon a discussion which would take up time and divert us from our primary object. But one cannot but regret that, with such a wealth of material at his disposal, Wagner did not make more of the character of Gutrune; as it is, she is really too shadowy even to be a foil to Brünnhilde, who would rather have gained in interest had she had a more tangible rival in Siegfried's affections. On the whole, the action of the drama, and the necessary compression involved, presses very hardly on these Rhine-kings: the mother, who, if not always the imposing and fateful figure of the Volsunga-saga, is at least sympathetic and dignified, has been swept away; so has the father (a lesser loss); the younger brothers, fierce and headstrong sometimes, but gallant and chivalrous, have also vanished; and of the whole group only Gunther and his sister remain, and they are mere puppets, tools under the sinister influence of Hagen. Gunther's dignity is not even saved by the fact

that Hagen's conduct, as in the Nibelungen-lied, is dictated by his feudal devotion to his master's interests and care for his honour. Here Hagen, like Hal o' the Wynd, 'fights for his own hand,' and the fact that it is his own interest, and not Gunther's, that he has in mind, operates disastrously on both characters.

But it must be admitted that in a drama ending with the catastrophe of Siegfried's death it would be difficult to make Gunther a dignified character—he is so manifestly human, and, as such, so utterly overweighted by his semi-divine brother-in-law and wife. To do full justice to the character, one needs the closing scenes of his life, in which, a man among men, confronted with an inevitable fate, he rises to a pitch of heroic grandeur, and meets his death with a courage and constancy which compel our admiration; Gunther in the 'worm-close' is as grand a figure as legend can show. The fact seems to be that, whether there ever was a mythical Gunther or not, the character has now become so completely euhemerised, and so thoroughly identified with the historical Burgundian king, that he is out of keeping with the characters of the early part of the saga, who still retain strong traces of their mythical origin; and is therefore only to be understood when, in connection with the Fall of the Nibelungs, we find him in the

surroundings coloured by his real history and proper to the character.[1]

The deception of which Brünnhilde is the victim is, of course, difficult to reproduce adequately on the stage; the most poetical version of the incident, and that which certainly appears to be the oldest, is the version given by the Volsunga-saga, where by means of incantations Sigurd and Gunnar literally change shapes (as do Signy and the witch-woman). It is to be noted, however, that this change does not appear to extend to the eyes. Brynhild (V.S. chapter xxix.) tells Sigurd that she 'deemed she knew his eyes'; and Wagner hints at this in the drama. The fact seems to be that the eyes of the hero are a surviving trait of his originally divine nature, and that no mortal dare face them. Twice over Guttorm refrains his murderous hand, and will not smite Sigurd till his eyes are closed in slumber; and one cannot but suspect that the fact that in the German versions of the legend Siegfried is smitten *from behind*, was originally to be referred to this peculiarity, which, too, is evidently

[1] The scene between Brünnhilde and Waltraute, which interferes with the progress of the legend, need only be referred to in a note. The whole situation, as portrayed by Waltraute, has been fully explained in the previous chapter. Brünnhilde's action is accounted for by the fact that she now *knows* the truth hinted at by Loge in the *Rhein-Gold*, and triumphantly proclaimed by Brünnhilde herself in the closing scene, that *love* is the one eternal and enduring good.

inherited by his children. The Edda relates that when Swanhild, the daughter of Sigurd and Gudrun, was condemned by King Jormunrek to be trodden underfoot by horses, they were compelled to muffle her head in a cloth before the sentence could be carried out, as the horses dared not face her eyes; and there is, not improbably, a reminiscence of the power of Sigurd's glance at the root of the story told of Aslaug's son, referred to in chapter iv.

The *Tarn-kappe*, which we find in the Nibelungen-lied, seems to be a later and *märchenhaft* attempt to explain the deception; the Thidrek-saga, which only requires that Brynhild be deceived during the hours of night, suggests no magical explanation — Gunther and Siegfried simply change garments, and the darkness apparently does the rest; but such a solution was not sufficient for the Nibelungen-lied, which requires that Brynhild be deceived during the trial of strength, as well as in the marriage-chamber.

The virtue of the *Tarn-kappe* (or Helm) is to make the wearer invisible, and to dower him with superhuman strength, *not* to enable him, as in the drama, to take the form of another man. The fact that the agent in the deception is a special talisman, and no longer runes, or incantations, as in the Volsunga-saga, seems to point to a later version; and the form assumed here by the

talisman is probably due to the fact that there was a helmet of special virtue included in the Treasure. The Volsunga-saga speaks of the Helm of Awing (Oegirshelm), which had the power of smiting with terror all who beheld the wearer.

In the various stages through which the legend has passed, the relations between Sigurd and Brynhild, and the real nature of the wrong done by the hero, have become very much obscured. There is no doubt that they were originally betrothed to each other. That the betrothal was more than a mere exchange of vows seems most probable, both from the fact that the Northern versions knew the daughter of Sigurd and Brynhild, and the version which both Thidrek-saga and Nibelungen-lied give of the service rendered to Gunther by Siegfried—probably a reminiscence of the hero's original relations with Brynhild.

That Siegfried's apparent treachery was, in the first instance, unconscious is certain; and it seems more in accordance with the blameless character ascribed to the hero to believe that the account given by both Thidrek-saga and Nibelungen-lied departs from the older version by separating the one betrayal into two, and making each a conscious and a voluntary act.

That Brynhild had a right to consider herself not merely Sigurd's betrothed, but his wife, seems clear. Here, Wagner seems in the main to have

given the correct version of the story; but in finding in the desertion of Siegfried the cause which leads Brünnhilde to demand his death he has made a grave departure from the legend, and one which has a very unfortunate effect on the character of his heroine.

In every version of the legend, without exception, Brynhild does not bring about Siegfried's death in revenge for his desertion of her, but—and this is a very important difference—in retaliation for his having betrayed her carefully guarded secret to his wife.

The Volsunga-saga makes this clear. Brynhild knows perfectly well that Sigurd was an unconscious agent in the betrayal—it was his 'fate,' and as such had been foreseen by her, and she is of a sufficiently generous character not to punish him, bitterly as she resents his conduct, for what she knows he was unable to prevent; but, womanlike, she revenges herself on his wife, and it is only when she discovers that Sigurd has put her in the power of her envied rival that her proud spirit finds the situation intolerable, and she demands his death as atonement for the last and *conscious* wrong.

That this is the correct version, and the one which lies at the root of both Thidrek-saga and Nibelungen-lied, is evident, as it is the only solution of Brynhild's otherwise enigmatic conduct.

In the Thidrek-saga she calmly accepts Siegfried's cool explanation of his desertion—that she had no brother, and therefore a marriage with her was not to his advantage. In the Nibelungen-lied there is no statement of any previous connection between them, but her explanation of her tears at the sight of Kriemhild and Siegfried is quite inadequate, and is evidently only a poor substitute for the real and forgotten reason. But in each instance she keeps silence on what has passed *before* her marriage with Gunther, and bases her accusation of Siegfried on the ground of his betrayal of herself and Gunther to Kriemhild. Whatever the later compilers have forgotten, they have clearly retained the idea that in this, and not in the previous unconscious action, lay Siegfried's real sin against Brynhild.

In this, the true version of the story, it is impossible not to sympathise with Brynhild; but when, as in the drama, she sees that her former lover does not recognise her, and has absolutely forgotten everything connected with their meeting, instead of suspecting the real nature of the case, and keeping silence, she at once and *publicly* proclaims the nature of the relations between them (which surely a woman of the dignified character attributed to Brünnhilde would have died rather than do), and not only demands Siegfried's death, but freely tells Hagen where he may

be mortally wounded, we can only feel revolted by her craving for revenge, and lack of all womanly feeling.

We can hardly acquit Wagner of having here made a grave mistake. Up to this point he has elected to follow the indications of the Volsunga-saga, and has determinedly identified his heroine with the Valkyrie Sigrdrifa, attributing to her a divine origin, and gifting her with divine wisdom. It is too much to demand of us that we shall suddenly dissociate this Brünnhilde from the prototype with whom she has been so closely connected, and, in defiance of all the indications of the legend, and up till now of the *drama*, believe that she really has *no* knowledge of how matters stand with Siegfried, that she shall remember her divine birth, and yet act with less than womanly dignity.[1]

In the fact that it is she who reveals, and that of free will, Siegfried's vulnerable point, we have again a departure, and an unhappy one, from the original legend; there it is Kriemhild who betrays her husband, and that in all innocence, believing that she is enabling Hagen to shield him more effectually—a most pathetic incident, and one which may be traced to a mythic source, and therefore probably formed part of the story in its earliest form.

It is throughout in accordance with the legend

[1] See Note on p. 151.

to represent Siegfried as utterly unconscious of his impending doom, relying too completely on the blood-brotherhood between himself and his wife's relations to dread any treachery on their part; but this unconsciousness is far more natural in the legend, where the hero has lived for years with the Rhine-kings on terms of brotherly affection, has aided them in their wars, received part of their kingdom, and has every reason to believe himself beloved and honoured, than in the drama, where his knowledge of Gunther is of the slightest, and where Hagen's mysterious bearing and refusal to share in the oath of brotherhood would surely have put him upon his guard. But probably we ought, both here and in the legend, to regard Siegfried as being, in Scotch parlance, 'fey.'

The warning of the Rhine-maidens was, of course, suggested by the similar warning addressed to Hagen in the German versions, though there Hagen accepts and believes it, in the spirit of grim fatalism which characterises him throughout; though he revenges himself for the unwelcome truth by smiting off the head of the prophetess. In the account of Siegfried's death Wagner has followed the German tradition, which represents the hero as slain in the forest, and during a hunting expedition, rather than the Northern, where he is slain in his bed. The part of the Nibelungen-lied

which relates the death of Siegfried is admittedly one of the finest portions, if not the finest, of the poem; and there is an irresistible pathos in the contrast between the light-hearted unconsciousness of the hero and the dark treachery plotted against him. Siegfried is never more brilliant, more joyous, more utterly *alive* than in the moments preceding his death. More successful in the chase than his companions, he brings to the appointed trysting-place, not only the dead trophies of his skill, but a live bear fastened to his saddle-bow, which he first lets loose among the terrified serving-men, and then himself overtakes and kills single-handed.

Annoyed at the lack of wine, he upbraids Hagen with the petulance of offended dignity; 'if they did not treat the hunters better he would not be their hunting comrade again; he had well merited better treatment!' But with easy good-humour he forgets his annoyance as soon as Hagen suggests that there is a spring at hand, and a well-timed compliment to his swiftness of foot finds him ready to rise to the bait, and eager to give a proof of his vaunted skill. The very fact that he is so unsuspicious, so trusting, and easy to be deceived, makes the treachery of Gunther and Hagen appear all the blacker; and though, in fact, Siegfried in the Nibelungen-lied is really more guilty than Sigurd in the Volsunga-saga, yet the childlike

gaiety and unconsciousness of the character make one less willing to find an excuse for Hagen and the vindictive woman who spurs him on.

Without a thought that he is laying a snare for himself, Siegfried challenges Gunther and Hagen to race him to the spring, volunteering himself to carry the weight of hunting dress, shield, sword, and spear, while the other two lay aside their weapons and outer garments. Even thus burdened he easily outruns them, but with ready courtesy stands aside till Gunther has drunk first, and, as he in his turn bends to drink, it is with his *own* spear, laid aside in trustful unconsciousness, that Hagen smites him to the heart. As in the drama, he lifts his shield to fling at Hagen, and in the poem he carries out the action and smites his murderer to the ground.

The scorn of the dying man for the treachery which has thus taken him unarmed, and at a disadvantage, is very fine, and with contemptuous coldness he bids Gunther cease his lamentations:

> 'daz ist âne nôt
> daz der nâch scaden weinet, der in dâ hât getân
> der dienet michel schelden: ez waere bezzer verlân.'

But a softer mood comes over him at the thought of his wife, and there is a reproachful pathos in his appeal to Gunther: if he *can* keep faith with any one, he would fain commit Kriemhild to his care:

'Dô sprach vil jæmerlîche der verchwunde man:
"Welt ihr, künic edele, triuwen iht begân
in der werlt an iemen, lât iu bevolhen sîn
ûf fuwér genâde die lieben triutinne mîn."'

His last thoughts are for her: 'ne'er was a greater wrong done to a woman through her love.'

The death-scene in the drama, fine as it undoubtedly is, is yet inferior in beauty and pathos to this.

And here we must discuss the question, one much debated by scholars: Where was Siegfried really killed? In his bed, as in the Northern legend, or in the wood, as the Thidrek-saga and Nibelungen-lied represent? Rassmann does not hesitate to say that the Northern version represents, without doubt, the oldest form of the story, and with this Edzardi in his preface to Von der Hagen's translation of the Volsunga-saga agrees; on the other hand, Lichtemberger[1] points out that the variation in the manner of the hero's death may be accounted for by the differences existing between the countries and the peoples where the saga found a home. Thus it would be more natural for the Germans to represent Siegfried as slain in a forest, forests abounding in Germany, and the Germans being a hunting people; while the sparsely wooded tracts of Iceland and the long nights of the North would make it more natural for the Northern saga-men to represent

[1] *Le poème et la légende des Nibelungen.*

him as slain in the house and in his sleep. This remark appears very natural, and would certainly lead to the conclusion that, the legend being in the main originally German, the German version would of necessity be the older of the two; and this opinion is supported by the fact that even in the North this version of the story which held Sigurd to have been slain in daylight and in the open was not unknown. One of the many Eddaic songs dealing with the legend represents him as killed 'southward, on the banks of the Rhine'; another as assassinated while riding to the Thing. A prose note to the first, which says, 'Others say Sigurd was slain in his bed, but German men tell that he was killed in the forest,' is significant as showing that there were at an early period two versions of the legend, and that the *German* was such as it has descended to us.

It is noteworthy, too, on the hypothesis that the Volsunga-saga has departed from the original tradition, that the version there given of Gudrun's dream, foreshadowing the death of Sigurd, certainly points to his being slain in the open.

This opinion, probable enough when we only consider the versions as they stand, becomes much strengthened when we take into consideration the originally mythic nature of the hero. That Siegfried originally represented a sun-god there can be practically no doubt; we have already shown that

the story of his winning Brynhild (Sigrdrifa) is based upon the myth of Freyr and Gerda, and the circumstances of his death and burial seem as certainly to be connected with Baldur. It will be remembered that the gods, terrified at the portents which point to some misfortune befalling this best-loved of the Asas, extort an oath from all creation to do him no harm, the mistletoe, which they deem too insignificant to be dangerous, alone excepted.

This done, they amuse themselves by throwing missiles at Baldur, who remains uninjured, invulnerable to all weapons.

Loke, in the guise of an old woman, goes to Fricka (as Hagen does to Kriemhild), and asks her if all created things have taken the oath, winning from her, in all innocence, the admission that the mistletoe has been excepted. Armed with a twig of the shrub, Loke goes to the blind god, Hödur (*Hagen* is always represented as being blind of one eye), and tells him he will guide his hand to take part in the diversion of the gods. Hödur throws the mistletoe, which enters Baldur's temple and kills him. The body of the dead god is laid on a ship which is set alight, and Odin places on the finger of his dead son, as he lies on the funeral pyre, the ring Draupnir, from the pure gold of which every ninth night there drop eight shavings of the precious metal, though the ring itself never

becomes less. The resemblance between Draupnir and the ring of the Nibelungen Hoard has often been commented upon. Baldur's wife, Nanna, dies of grief, and is burnt on the funeral pyre with her husband. The analogy existing between the account of Baldur's death and that of Siegfried's leaves no doubt that the hero was originally a sun- or spring-god, even as Freyr and Baldur, and was identified in turn, now with the one, now with the other of these deities.

Now, it is a noticeable fact that the death of a divine, or semi-divine, hero is in many mythologies brought about during a hunting expedition and by means of a *wild boar*; a golden boar is in Northern mythology one of the symbols of the sun-god. There is a curious story of a certain Hackelbrand, a mythical individual, identified by some scholars with Odin, by others with Baldur, who on the eve of a hunt dreams of himself as engaged in a deadly struggle with an overpowering enemy. The next day they pursue and kill a mighty wild boar, and Hackelbrand, recognising the enemy of his dream, strikes the dead animal with his foot, exclaiming, 'Now strike if thou canst!' when the sharp tusk of the boar pierces his foot and causes a mortal wound.[1] The Egyptian god, Osiris, was slain by his enemy Typhon, in the

[1] For the story of Hackelbrand *vide* Simrock, *Deutschen Mythologie*, p. 201.

guise of a wild boar; and it was a boar which caused the death of Adonis.

Remembering these facts, and that Siegfried is undoubtedly connected with the sun-gods of the North, Hagen's explanation of the cause of Siegfried's death in the Thidrek-saga, 'We hunted a wild boar, and that boar gave him his death,' becomes curiously significant; whether Wagner had this connection in his mind or not, one cannot say, but he has happily retained this trait in the drama.

We have already noted as a peculiarity of the Thidrek-saga, that, though later in compilation, and inferior in literary value to the Northern version, it nevertheless retains distinct traces of an older form of the legend than that preserved by the Volsunga-saga, though this older form is often obscured by the evident anxiety of the compiler to harmonise the German version with that popular in the North. Thus we find that, though he represents Siegfried as slain in the wood, he relates how the hero's dead body was brought home and laid in the bed beside his wife—an act of brutality on the part of the murderers (who in the Nibelungen-lied only lay the corpse outside Kriemhild's door) apparently due to his desire not to entirely omit the Northern form of the story.

The conclusion seems to be that, judging from mythical analogy, and the testimony of the

German versions, the original scene of Siegfried's death must have been a wood or forest, and the occasion a hunting expedition; and it may well be that, before the story of this Aryan hero became so closely entwined with the Northern myth of the fatal Nibelungen Hoard, the cause of his death was the traditional wild boar. But the fact that Siegfried early became identified with Baldur would introduce another element into the story, and this, fitting more easily into the framework of the Nibelungen legend, which demanded that the death of the hero be due to the action of a *conscious* agent, and a deadly enemy, finally entirely displaced the more primitive version.

It seems impossible to judge the question fairly without consideration of the strong mythical elements in the hero's character; and equally impossible, having taken this element into account, to avoid the conclusion that the German versions followed by the drama are really representative of the original facts of the case.

But if there be a difference of opinion as to the scene of Siegfried's death, there can be but little controversy as to who was his murderer. Both the German versions agree in assigning this *rôle* to Hagen; the Volsunga-saga alone represents Hogni (Hagen) as resolutely opposed to the deed, as it is also alone in making Gunnar survive Hogni; though it is in accordance with the Thidrek-

saga in representing Gudrun as carrying out her vengeance by the aid of Hogni's son, who here bears the significant name of Niblung. As remarked before, the Northern version makes Hogni Gunnar's brother, whereas in the Thidrek-saga he is but Gunther's half-brother, the son of an elf (as in the drama); and in the Nibelungen-lied he is Gunther's 'man,' and only a distant relation.

In the German versions Hagen is always represented as of a fierce and awe-inspiring aspect; his face is pale as ashes, his hair and beard grizzled, and he has but one eye. The Thidrek-saga accounts for his grim appearance by the story of his supernatural birth; but the whole description of Hagen points him out as originally and essentially the direct opposite of Siegfried, whose golden armour, beauty of countenance, and joyous disposition render him the object of universal love and admiration, as Hagen is of dislike and dread. The one is manifestly the representative of a power of light, the other of darkness.

Nevertheless, Hagen knows more of Siegfried than either Gunther or his fellow-courtiers know. When the young hero appears at Worms the Burgundians are all in doubt as to his identity; it is Hagen who names him, and who relates his early exploits, the slaying of the dragon and the winning of the Nibelungen Hoard. With this

latter it is impossible to doubt that Hagen is very closely connected; it is worthy of note that in all the versions the Treasure eventually comes into his hands, and it is *he* who is the agent in consigning it to its final place of concealment. In the Nibelungen-lied this connection with the treasure is specially apparent; after the death of Siegfried (who, curiously enough, never seems to care particularly for the Treasure—as a rule he wins it accidentally and without set desire on his part; the Volsunga-saga alone represents him as knowing of the gold beforehand, and being actuated by the motive of winning it), Hagen watches jealously over the gold, and deprives Kriemhild of all access to the Treasure before he finally hides it; and in two instances it is *his* son who works out the final curse of the gold by slaying Etzel, or Atli, who would fain possess it.

It is true that Hagen nowhere slays Siegfried with the apparent object of possessing the Hoard himself, but always out of loyalty to his sovereign's wife, and care for his sovereign's honour; and this *motif* is specially insisted upon in the Nibelungen-lied. But this presentation of the legend is so strongly coloured throughout by ethical ideas, and the German conception of 'Treue,' that the original conception has undoubtedly undergone considerable modification.

Taking into consideration the importance which

in every version of the story is assigned to Hagen, an importance which in the Nibelungen-lied goes near to making him the equal of Siegfried in dignity and interest; the obscurity which overhangs his origin and relation to Gunther; his strange appearance; and the fact that he is invariably the last holder of the Treasure,—we cannot but conclude that we have here a survival of one of the original figures of the legend, the hereditary opponent and foe of the hero, and therefore most probably the representative of the powers from whom he won the gold (*not* the rightful owner of the gold, for Hagen himself is subject to the curse); in other words, that Hagen really is, as represented in the drama, the survival of the original Nibelungs. That he may be even older than this, and as Hödur, Baldur's murderer, part of the original mythic groundwork of the saga, is highly probable. As far back as we can put the personified opposition of light and darkness, so far back may we put the real root of the enmity between Siegfried and Hagen; the one character is as old as the other.

The account given of Hagen's birth by the Thidrek-saga, which account has been adopted in the drama, seems more likely to have been an attempt to explain the supernatural character, which still in a measure attached to Hagen, than an authentic tradition. Certainly the

version given in the drama is incorrect; Alberich and Hagen, so far from being father and son, are, in the very essence of their being, utterly opposed to each other. Alberich, or Elberich, is, as his name indicates, an elf or albe. These beings were divided into two classes, Lichtalben and Schwarzalben, and Simrock points out that this prefix indicates no difference either in their character or their colour; their common name, 'Albe,' is connected with *albus*, 'white,' and both classes are of fair aspect and kindly disposition; but one, the Lichtalben, have their home in the sun, the other, the Schwarzalben, in the earth. The whole character of Alberich, as depicted in German legend, bears out this remark of Simrock's. His home is certainly in the earth, as certainly he is *not* a Schwarzalbe in the sense Wagner gives us to understand.[1]

The poem of *König Ortnit*, a work apparently of the early part of the thirteenth century, gives a very charming presentment of Alberich, and it seems not unlikely that this poem has coloured the story of Hagen as given in the Thidrek-saga. King Ortnit, on the eve of his departure for the East to win as his bride a Moorish princess of far-famed beauty, receives from his mother a ring, which he is told to guard carefully, and bidden by her to ride in a certain direction,

[1] Cf. Simrock, *Deutschen Mythologie*, pp. 430 *et seq.*

where he will meet with adventures. He obeys her, and comes to a flowery meadow, overshadowed by a linden, beneath which a lovely child of apparently some three or four years old lies asleep. Ortnit, thinking this to be a strayed child, takes it in his arms, when he receives a staggering blow on the chest, and finds to his surprise that this apparent infant is possessed of more than the strength of a full-grown man. After a struggle between them the child reveals himself as Alberich, king of the elves, and Ortnit's real father, only visible to him by means of the ring his mother had given him. He presents his son with a magnificent suit of armour, and promises him his aid in winning the Moorish princess, a promise which he faithfully keeps.[1]

It is in this character of Elf-king that Alberich became known in France, where his name has been modified to *Oberon*! Certainly the idea we attach to Oberon is widely different from that suggested by Wagner's Alberich, but it is undoubtedly more in accordance with original tradition.

The early part of the Thidrek-saga represents Alberich as a dwarf-king, through whose instrumentality Dietrich of Bern wins his armour and the sword, Nagel-ring; but here, though not an unkindly character, he is represented as a skilful

[1] Cf. Von der Hagen, *Heldenbuch*, vol. i.

thief, an evident confusion with *Elbegast*, or *Alegast*, another elf or dwarf, who was a famous thief. Whether this latter is the same as the mythical Master-thief, *Ágaz*, referred to by the Meistersingers, is not clear, but in the *Waltherius*, a work of the tenth century, Hagen's father is called Agazi, which Lachmann identifies with Agaz. The Thidrek-saga nowhere makes *Alberich* Hagen's father, and his connection with the Nibelungen-lied seems entirely to depend on his well-known character as guardian of a treasure, though there he guards it for another, and not, as more correctly, for himself.

It was probably a reminiscence of the well-known tale of King Ortnit, combined with the fact that Alberich was already connected with the Nibelungen-lied, which influenced Wagner in his choice of Hagen's father; but it cannot be denied that the character of Alberich as represented in the *Ring* does a grave injustice to a very graceful and charming figure of German legend.

The fine incident in the drama, where the dead man's hand rises to repel Hagen's intended theft of the ring, was doubtless suggested by the scene in the Nibelungen-lied where, as Siegfried lies in state in the Minster, Kriemhild demands, in accordance with a well-known mediæval superstition, that Gunther and Hagen, who have

stoutly denied any share in the hero's death (attributing it to robbers), shall approach and touch the bier; and at Hagen's touch the wounds bleed afresh, thus making his guilt manifest to all. Gutrune's ready abandonment of her claim to Siegfried, at Brünnehilde's demand, is, though in accordance with the shadowy *rôle* assigned to her in the drama, utterly at variance with the legend, where the description of the bereaved wife's despair forms an important feature in every version; witness the lay of Gudrun translated in chapter xxi. of Morris and Magnússon's translation of the Volsunga-saga, and the beautiful scene in the Nibelungen-lied where, at the last moment, Kriemhild insists on the coffin being opened that she may look once more on the fair face and kiss the dead lips of her husband.

Some critics have held that it is the measureless grief of Gudrun, to which the Northern saga has given such magnificent expression, that spurs Brynhild on to her act of self-murder; it is the only way in which she can triumph over her hated rival, and win Sigurd for her own.

In both the German versions of the legend Brynhild disappears from the scene after Siegfried's death; her vengeance sated, and her outraged dignity appeased, she has nothing more to do with the action of the story. But it is undoubtedly far more in accordance with the

mythical origin of the character to make her die, as does Baldur's wife, with the man she has loved so fiercely.

It is impossible to deny the grandeur of this closing scene of the *Götterdämmerung*, but the grandeur of Brünnhilde is that of the Valkyrie and not of the woman. She may proclaim love to be the one eternal, enduring good; she may announce herself as having passed, as a woman, through suffering to knowledge; but it is impossible not to feel that the love which makes eventually for possession and not for renunciation, at the cost of shame and suffering to the loved one, is *not* the highest love, and that Brünnhilde, *as a woman*, had a great deal more to learn! Practically, the philosophical lesson of the drama, the renunciation of the will accepted by Wotan, is rejected by Brünnhilde, who in her final action is undoubtedly and exclusively actuated by the desire of eternal union with, and possession of, her beloved Siegfried.

And here, as the Rhine-maidens claim once more their long-lost heritage, and the flames which denote the completion of the curse of the gold and the fall of Walhalla and its gods light up the scene, the great drama finds its fitting close; and we who have followed the action step by step from its commencement may pause and ask whether the form in which Wagner has cast

the great legend of the North is to be accepted as a true representation of its original form. Regarded from some aspects, it may certainly be contended that the version given by the drama, so far as it goes, does represent what was probably the original shape of the story more accurately than any *one* of the versions from which Wagner drew, and that a correct dramatic instinct has led him to combine these older features which are not the special property of any one version, but are elsewhere found apart from each other: *e.g.* that he was right in representing the hero as brought up in the solitude of the wood, and in ignorance of his parentage, as in the Thidrek-saga, and in combining that with his awakening of the Valkyrie, the special property of the Volsunga-saga; right, too, in representing Hagen as closely connected with the Treasure—a real act of reconstruction, as this part of the story had become completely obscured, though the *means* by which the connection is established do not approve themselves as consonant with the primitive form; and right in selecting, out of the conflicting versions of Siegfried's death, that which is favoured by the German compilers, and agrees best with the mythical origin of the hero.

That, as a whole, this great work, in which Wagner's aim was wider, if not higher, than in his other dramas, is not his greatest success, must

be admitted, but the reason lies to the full as much with the material to be moulded as with the hand of the moulder. A tradition so colossal in its proportions, so *urweltlich* in its origin, so extended in its ramifications, and so obscure in its details, could hardly be brought into any form which should represent swiftly and coherently the facts of the story, deal with the hidden meaning of its mysterious action, and do no injustice to the legend by the omission of much which is of importance. As a matter of fact, it would have needed not one Tetralogy alone, but two, if not three, to deal adequately with the source of the Hoard, the Life and Death of Siegfried, the vengeance on his murderers, and final loss of the Treasure; and we can hardly blame Wagner if we find the narrow limits of the one scarcely sufficient for the purpose; it was well that the work should be done, and none but he could have done it.

In the light of this nineteenth century resuscitation of the great Teutonic hero, the words of the old saga-man have a quaintly prophetic ring when, speaking of Siegfried, the compiler of the Thidrek-saga says: 'And therefore were his arms gold-inwrought because he surpassed all other men in dignity, and nobleness, and all beauty; yea, even in the old sagas wherein men tell of the strongest, and most famous, and most

free-handed of all heroes and princes: and his name goes abroad in all tongues from the North even to the Greek-land sea, and so shall it be so long as the world endures.'

Since concluding the above study the writer has met with Professor Rydberg's *Teutonic Mythology*, containing an interesting and carefully worked-out theory of the origin of the Nibelung Hoard. As the theory suggests an explanation of some of the points noted in these studies, an abstract of it may be of interest to the reader. Rydberg identifies the sons of Iwaldi, who were cunning workmen, and adorned Asgard by their skill, and wrought golden treasures for the gods, Odin's spear among them, with Völund (Wieland) the smith, and his brothers, Egil and Slagfinn. At first friends and servants of the gods, they quarrelled with them on account of their work being judged inferior to that of Sindri, who forged Thor's hammer; and went forth from Asgard to the lower world, where they forged a wondrous 'sword of victory,' with which to attack the gods, who try by every means to get the sword into their own hands. (If Wieland be really identical with the son of Iwaldi, then the 'sword of victory'=Mimung, and we see at once why that weapon is represented in the Thidrek-saga as superior to Gram, *supra*, p. 100.)

Rydberg considers that the Nibelungen Hoard is the treasure which these three brothers took with them from Asgard, and, being unable to carry, concealed either in the earth or in the water (probably in both).

Völund (*i.e.* Wieland) himself apparently possessed a marvellous arm-ring, the special virtue of which is not clearly indicated; Rydberg thinks that it had the power of multiplying itself. When Wieland flies from King Nidung he leaves seven hundred gold rings behind him. Völund's brother, Egil, has by others besides Rydberg been identified with the dwarf-king Eugel, whose treasure Siegfried wins; and Rydberg proves that Slagfinn, the third brother, is also known by the name of Gjuki; he therefore considers that the Gjukings (*i.e.* Niblungs) were hereditary owners of at least part of the Hoard.

The weak point of the theory is that if this were the case they ought not to be affected by the curse, which falls on them equally with Siegfried. But if the sons of Iwaldi had, in the first instance, no right to the gold which had been intrusted to them by the gods for the decoration of Asgard, but had stolen it when they fled to the lower world, then the position becomes perfectly clear. The theory is in any case an ingenious one, and certainly seems to clear up some points of special difficulty.

In his study on the *Ring des Nibelungen* (London: Nutt, 1897), Mr. W. F. Sheppard objects to my treatment of this important episode as misleading. According to him, Brynhild, in the *Volsunga-Saga*, did not know of the deception practised upon her till informed of it by Gudrun; and Wagner has simply substituted a statement of the real relations between herself and Siegfried for the false accusation which, in the earlier epic, she brings against the hero. The Northern poems are very fragmentary, and far from clear in their indications, and it is by no means certain that Brynhild, in the *Volsunga-Saga*, is in ignorance of the facts of the case. On the other hand, it is quite certain that Brynhild's relation with Sigurd was of the most intimate nature—as I have said above, Northern tradition knows their daughter, and she has lived under the same roof with him for some time before the crisis of the tragedy—so she can hardly have been altogether ignorant of the matter. A careful comparison of the versions seems to show that the accusation she brings against Sigurd was not necessarily false (*cf. supra*, p. 127). All these points were in my mind when I wrote, and I cannot but adhere to the opinion then expressed, that Wagner's version, necessitated as it doubtless was by reasons of dramatic exigency, is distinctly lowering to the character of the heroine, and inferior to the earlier versions of the story. It is quite true that Brünnhilde has parted with her original wisdom; but magic drinks and their influence on the relation of the sexes were a familiar part of the life of that day, and if no longer the inspired Valkyr, she was at least a woman of exceptional intelligence and dignity of character. Personally I always feel that there is a lack of continuity between the heroine of the *Valkyrie* and of the *Götterdämmerung*, but, as I said above, I think it is a mere matter of opinion, on which critics can well afford to differ.

Parsifal

THE LEGEND

CHAPTER VII

Parsifal

Introductory remarks—The Grail cycle—Original home of the legend—A Celtic variant of the Aryan Expulsion and Return Formula—Various forms of the Perceval legend—Parzival.

To such of our readers as may be unfamiliar with the origin of the sources which lie at the root of the Wagnerian Drama, it may seem a mistaken judgment that places this, the last and most distinctively Christian of all Wagner's works, the one in which, though the philosophical idea be not absent, the symbolism is yet definitely cast in a mould consecrated by Christian tradition, immediately next to the drama in which Paganism reigns unchallenged: it might have seemed more fitting to interpose between the two one of the works in which the master has so skilfully portrayed the conflict between the Old Faith and the New, either *Lohengrin* or *Tannhäuser*. But the reason for this arrangement lies in the fact that, widely different as the two stories are,

a common mythical tradition lies at the root of both, and Parsifal (or Perceval) is but the Celtic, or more accurately Kymric, variant of that prehistoric Aryan hero of whom Siegfried is the Teutonic survival.

The story of Perceval is, however, characterised by certain definite and strongly marked folk-lore features which do not exist in the Siegfried legend, and we may perhaps differentiate the two by saying that on the whole Siegfried belongs to the *saga*, Perceval to the *märchen*, stage of mythical development.

The latter part of the twelfth century witnessed a curious, and in some ways unique, literary phenomenon; the sudden and practically simultaneous appearance within the space of about fifty years (1170-1220) of a body of romantic literature, dealing more or less directly with a special Talisman (eventually identified as of wholly Christian character), which body of romance is known as the Grail cycle.[1]

The most curious and perplexing feature of this cycle is, that, whichever of these romances we consider the oldest, the work of Chrêtien de Troyes or that of Robert de Borron, that romance presupposes a source, and that source is lost—it is, therefore, impossible to speak with *certainty* as to the original form of the myth. Another

[1] Vide *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail.* A. Nutt. Chap. i.

curious feature of the problem is the almost equally sudden cessation of activity within this special field; the Grail romances later than the date given above are few in number, and of little or no literary value, and with Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, three hundred years later, they cease altogether. For all practical purposes of literary investigation as to the origin of the myth, the Grail literature is confined within the limits of these fifty years. The origin and development of the cycle being thus obscure, it is difficult to account for the extreme popularity into which the myth so suddenly sprang, and to know whether this popularity were *entirely* due to the character of the talisman itself, which, whether Christian or not in origin, certainly lent itself with singular felicity to Christian development; or whether the Grail first became popular by its connection with the hero of a very widespread and undoubtedly popular folk-tale.

In any case the romances of the Grail cycle may, as Mr. Nutt well points out, be divided into two separate classes; one of which deals with the early history of the talisman, and has been strongly influenced by Christian hagiology, especially as represented in some of the spurious gospels, of which the early centuries of the Christian faith were so prolific; and the other dealing with the quest for the Grail, which is, in its

earliest forms, closely connected with the folk-tale above referred to.

That this story of Peredur, Perceval, or Parzival is of British-Celtic origin is practically certain, and the hero retains in every language clear traces of his nationality, being either of '*Galles*,' '*li Galois*,' or '*der Waleis*.' From Wales the legend passed into Brittany, and from thence into the hands of the Northern French poets, who moulded it into the form in which it has descended to us.

Accepting, then, the fact that Perceval *is* a 'Formula-hero,' and comparing the incidents of his story with the outline given in chapter iv., as well as with the legends connected with other heroes of the same family, it becomes apparent that the Grail, *qua* Grail, forms no part of the original framework, nor can we discover any one special talisman, common to the Formula, which might have been developed into the Grail; but that, as a fact, the latter is found in connection with none of the Formula heroes save Perceval alone. We may therefore not unreasonably conclude (*a*) that the story of Perceval is, in its earliest form, independent of the Grail myth; (*b*) that it was some peculiarity in the special Celtic presentment of the Formula which invited the connection—considerations which decidedly favour Mr. Nutt's main contention that the history of the Holy

Grail is the history of the development of a Celtic and purely Pagan talisman into a distinctively Christian symbol. The various forms in which the legend of Perceval has come down to us may be summarised as follows:—

FRENCH
- *Li Conte del Graal.* Poem, by Chrêtien de Troyes; left unfinished by him, and continued by at least three other writers.
- *Perceval.* Prose romance, ascribed to Robert de Borron.
- *Perceval li Gallois.* Prose romance, by an unknown writer.

WELSH. *Peredur.* Tale found in the Red Book of Hergest.

ENGLISH. *Sir Percyvelle de Galles.* Metrical romance, author unknown.

GERMAN. *Parzival.* Epic poem by Wolfram von Eschenbach.

It is this last which Wagner has followed throughout his drama, and it will therefore be unnecessary to give an abstract of any of the other romances, though it may be well to state that Chrêtien's poem, which in the opinion of many scholars is the oldest extant version of the story, agrees very closely with Wolfram's *Parzival.* There is undoubtedly a common source at the root of the two works.[1]

[1] For discussion of the various versions of the Perceval legend and the connection between Chrêtien and Wolfram, see English translation of *Parzival.* 2 vols. D. Nutt, 1894-95.

Parzival

(This poem differs from other versions of the legend in having a distinct ethical purpose at its root: *i.e.* the poet is desirous of showing how lack of faith may mar an otherwise noble character; yet, that by steadfastness of purpose and loyalty of soul, a man may atone for his early failures, and win the blessing once forfeited.

The first two books of the poem are also peculiar to the German version, and are to be regarded as introductory to the real traditional matter.)

Gamuret, prince of Anjou, on the death of his father, King Gandein, thought it not well to remain as vassal to his brother, but would fare forth to seek fame for himself. In his journeyings he came to Patelamunt, in the land of the Moors, where the queen, Belakane, was beset by enemies. Then Gamuret came to her aid, and defeated her enemies; the queen wedded him, and he became king of Assagog and Zassamank. But after a time he waxed weary, since there was no fighting to be done, and he also thought it ill that his wife should be a heathen, so he sailed away secretly, leaving a letter which told of his rank and lineage. After his departure Belakane gave birth to a son, who was black and white even as his parents came of differing races, and she called her son's name Feirefis Angevin. Now when Gamuret

sailed from Belakane he landed at Seville, and it was told him how Queen Herzeleide, the lady of Waleis and Norgals, was holding a tournament before Kanvoleis, and how her hand and kingdom were to be the prize of the victor. Gamuret went thither and fought, and was proclaimed victor; and since his first wife, Belakane, was a heathen, it was held that his marriage to her was void, and he must needs wed Herzeleide. After they had been wedded eighteen months Gamuret went to the aid of the Baruch of Bagdad, and was treacherously slain in battle; after his death Queen Herzeleide gave birth to Parzival, the hero of this tale.

(Here the traditional story of Perceval begins.)

Then Herzeleide, fearing lest her son should, even as his father, be slain in battle, fled to the forest of Soltane, where she took an oath of her people that they would speak no word of knighthood to the lad, and thus Parzival grew up in the woodland, unwitting of his own name or rank, and knowing naught of any weapons save those he made himself.

But one day it came to pass that he met with four knights in full armour, and at first he thought that surely they were gods; but when he learned that they were but knights, he prayed them to tell him how he, too, might become as they; and they bade him seek the court of King

Arthur and ask knighthood at his hands. Parzival then went to his mother, and prayed of her a steed that he might ride to the king; and the queen bethought her that if she sent him forth in such guise that the folk would mock him, he would return more quickly to her, so she clad him in a fool's dress, and gave him a sorry steed to ride on, and sent him forth with good counsels. And when he left her she ran weeping on the road behind him till she could see her son no longer, and her heart brake for sorrow, and she fell dead by the wayside.

Parzival came to a tent where a fair lady was sleeping, and because his mother had told him that it was good to win a love-token from a fair woman he took from her her ring and necklet, against her will, and rode on his way. But little time after he met with a maiden, weeping over a dead knight, who revealed unto him his true name and lineage, and told him how she was his cousin, Sigune.

Then Parzival came to Nantes, where King Arthur was holding his court, and without the walls he met with a gallant knight, in red armour, named Ither of Gaheviess, who laid claim to King Arthur's kingdom, and in token thereof had borne away a cup of gold from off the king's table. He bade Parzival bear his challenge to King Arthur; and the lad came into the hall of

the king's palace, and spake as the knight had bade him; and none knew what to make of his fair face and strange manner. Then he demanded knighthood of King Arthur, and prayed him to give him the armour of the Red Knight whom he had met without the city, and the king said it should be as he willed.

Then Parzival went forth to claim the armour; and the queen and her ladies saw him as he passed, and the princess, Kunnewaare of Lalande, who had sworn never to laugh till she saw him who should be the bravest of knights, when she looked on Parzival laughed aloud; and Kay smote her in anger, but Parzival sware in his heart to avenge the maiden's shame.

So Parzival came to Ither of Gaheviess, and bade him give up his armour since King Arthur had promised it to him; the Red Knight would not, but in his anger smote Parzival with his spear to the ground. But the lad threw a javelin at him, which pierced his eye, and slew him; and then Parzival took his armour and girt it on him above his fool's dress, and mounted the dead knight's charger, and so rode from Nantes.

Then he came to the castle of Gurnemanz of Graharz, who received him kindly, and because he saw that Parzival knew naught of knightly customs he kept him with him twice seven days, and taught him to use his weapons rightly, and

to behave as befitted a courteous knight, and bade him not to be ever asking questions.

Parzival left Gurnemanz and rode to the city of Pelrapär, where the young queen, Kondwiramur, was besieged by sea and land, by the armies of King Klamide. He promised to aid her, and overthrew both the king and his seneschal, Kingron, and sent them as prisoners to the lady Kunnewaare; and himself wedded Queen Kondwiramur, and became king of the land.

But after a time he would fain seek his mother, for he knew not that she was dead: so he rode forth alone, and at evening he came to a water, and on it there was a boat at anchor, with men fishing; and one of them who was richly dressed bade Parzival be his guest for the night, and told him the way to his castle. The men of the castle received Parzival with honour, and robed him in a royal mantle, and led him to a wondrous hall, where sat four hundred knights; and the Fisher-King who had bidden him hither lay on a couch before the fire, for he could neither sit nor stand. Then a squire passed through the hall, bearing in his hand a spear, from the point of which there flowed a drop of blood, and when all who were in the hall saw it they wept aloud. And when the squire had passed through the hall there came a procession of fair maidens, bearing a costly table, and lights and sweet perfumes; and the last, who

was the fairest of all, bare in her hands the Grail, and laid it on the table before the king.

Then the squires and serving-men knelt before the Grail with the golden dishes and cups, and the dishes were filled with all manner of meat, and the cups with wine, and every one ate and drank even as he would. And Parzival wondered greatly, but he thought of Gurnemanz's teaching, and asked no question; and even when they brought him a goodly sword, the gift of the host, he asked not what it meant.

Then the maidens took up the Grail again, and the procession left the hall, even as it entered; and through the open door Parzival saw in an outer room an old man, lying on a couch, with white hair and beard, and of fair and noble aspect, but he asked not who he was.

Then they led him to a bedchamber, and fair maidens brought him wine and fruits from Paradise, and he slept; but his dreams were evil, and when he woke the sun was high in heaven, his armour and the two swords lay beside him, but there was no man there. Then he armed himself and went forth, and in the courtyard he found his steed tied, but the castle was deserted, and no man came in answer to his call. But as he rode forth across the drawbridge it was raised so swiftly that he well-nigh fell into the moat, and a voice cried upon him, and mocked him, and said since he had

asked no question he had lost great blessedness; but when Parzival would have known the meaning of the words he could win no answer. As he rode through the woodland he met with his cousin Sigune, weeping over the embalmed body of her dead knight; he spake to her, and she told him he had been in the castle of Monsalväsch, and had seen its king, Anfortas, and the wonders of the Grail; but when she found he had asked no question she cursed him for a false knight, and would speak to him no more.

So Parzival rode on his way; and he met the lady, whose ring and necklet he had taken, clad in rags and mounted on a wretched steed, for her husband deemed she had betrayed him, and had given the tokens to a favoured lover. But Parzival fought with the knight, and overthrew him, and sware to him that his wife was guiltless, and so they were made friends again.

Now King Arthur, who had heard of the valiant deeds of the Red Knight (for so men called Parzival since he had slain Ither of Gaheviess and taken his armour), would fain have made him one of the Round Table, and had ridden forth with his court to seek him, and was near at hand, though Parzival knew it not. That night Parzival was sleeping in the forest, and there was a fall of snow, and in the morning the ground was white around him. And it came to pass that as he rode

through the woodland, a hawk that had escaped from the king's falconer flew after him, struck at a wild goose and wounded it, so that three drops of blood fell on the snow. Then when Parzival saw the red blood on the white snow he bethought him of Kondwiramur his wife, and he fell into a love-trance and knew naught of what passed around him; and so the knights of King Arthur's court found him. And since they thought that it touched their honour that one should bear arms thus near their camp, they would fight with him; and Parzival overthrew both Segramor and Kay, and knew not that he done so. Then Gawain spread a silken cloth over the blood-drops, and when Parzival saw them no longer, the spell was broken, and he rode with Gawain to the court of King Arthur.

A great feast was made in his honour, and he was prayed to become one of the knights of the Round Table. But as they were feasting, there came the messenger of the Grail, Kondrie the sorceress, who was hideous exceedingly; and before them all she cursed Parzival for a false and dishonoured knight, since he had not asked the king of Monsalväsch, Anfortas, what ailed him; had he done so, Anfortas would have been healed of his sickness, and Parzival had won great honour. And she rode away, weeping.

Then came the knight, Kingrimursel, who

accused Gawain of having treacherously slain his king and master, and challenged him to single combat. And when Parzival saw how he and Gawain were put to open shame, and yet were guiltless, then he cried aloud that there could be no God, else He would rule matters better; and he forsware God's service, and said he would never rest till he had found the Grail and asked the question, nor would he be one of their brotherhood till his dishonour was wiped out. So he and Gawain rode from the court of King Arthur.

(The next two books deal with the adventures of Gawain, and may therefore be omitted.)

Now after Parzival had wandered for well-nigh five years in doubt and despair, and had failed to find the castle of Monsalväsch, he met one morning with a party of pilgrims, and the old knight who led them rebuked him for riding armed on Good Friday; and when he learned that in truth Parzival knew not what day it was, for he had lost all count of time, nor did he serve God, but held Him to be his enemy, he bade him ride to the hermit, Trevrezent, and tell his grief to him and receive counsel and absolution. Parzival did as the knight told him, and Trevrezent received him kindly; but when he found that he was seeking for the Grail, he bade him give up the quest,

since none could find it save those whom God led to it. And further he told him how the Grail was a wondrous stone that came from heaven, and its power was renewed each Good Friday by a host which was brought from heaven by a dove. And he told him how Titurel was the first king of the Grail, and how in his old age he had given up the kingdom to his son Frimutel, though Titurel himself yet lived, sustained by the life-giving sight of the Grail. How Anfortas, son of Frimutel, was now king of Monsalväsch, but because he had been led away by mere earthly love, and had not chosen according to the law of the Grail, he had been wounded in a joust by a poisoned spear, and could not be healed till a knight should come to the castle, and should ask the king what ailed him. He, Trevrezent, was Anfortas' brother, and had forsworn a worldly life that he might, by prayer and fasting, win his brother's healing and salvation.

Then Parzival made known to Trevrezent how he had himself been to Monsalväsch, and looked on the Grail, but had asked no question. And when Trevrezent heard of his parentage he knew that he was in truth his nephew, the son of his sister, Herzeleide; and he told him how two mortal sins lay upon him, since he had broken his mother's heart by leaving her, and had slain in his folly Ither of Gaheviess, who was his near

kinsman—and for these sins he had not been held worthy to win the Grail.

Then Parzival made confession of his sins, and was absolved, and rode away sorrowful, yet restored to faith in God.

(The poem here reverts again to the adventures of Gawain in the service of the lady Orgeluse, who had been Anfortas' love; tells of his winning the Château Merveil, built by the enchanter Klingsor, whose prisoners he frees, and of his final meeting with Parzival, at which point the history of the principal hero is taken up again.)

Now it came to pass that one day as Parzival rode armed and solitary he met with another knight, and the two fought fiercely together, and Parzival had well-nigh slain his foe when there came up pages who called upon his name, and Parzival knew him for Gawain, his friend and kinsman, and he cast away his sword and would fight no more. Then Gawain bade him come to the court of King Arthur, who had ridden thither with all his courtiers to see the fight between Gawain and Gramoflanz, the foe of the lady Orgeluse. Parzival fought with and overthrew Gramoflanz; but though King Arthur and his knights would fain have done him honour, his heart was heavy since he had failed to find the Grail, and was ever separated from his wife; thus he was in no mood for feasting, but in the early

morning he left the camp in secret, and rode once more on his way. While the day was yet in the dawning he met with a heathen knight in costly armour, who rode in search of adventures, and would fight with Parzival. The fight was a mighty one, and Parzival was well-nigh beaten to the ground, when he cried upon his wife, and fresh strength came to him, and he smote his foeman to the earth, but the sword brake in his hand. Then they ceased from strife, and asked of each other's name and lineage, and Parzival found that the heathen knight was none other than his brother Feirefis, Gamuret's son.

The two brothers rode to the court of King Arthur, and a great feast was made in their honour; and while they were feasting, the Grail messenger, Kondrie, rode into the ring, and prayed Parzival to forgive her for the shame she had brought upon him before, and said that his trial was ended, and his sin blotted out; the Grail had named him king, and she herself was sent to lead him to Monsalväsch.

Parzival and his brother, Feirefis, joyfully took leave of King Arthur, and rode to Monsalväsch, and there Parzival asked the king what ailed him, and straightway Anfortas was made whole, and Parzival became king in his stead. Then he rode forth as he was bidden to meet his wife, Kondwiramur, and there, on the spot where he

had seen the blood-drops on the snow, he found her sleeping in her tent with her twin sons, Kardeiss and Lohengrin. Parzival made all the nobles of Brobarz take oath of fealty to Kardeiss, and ride back with him to their own country; but he and Kondwiramur and Lohengrin returned to Monsalväsch to the service of the Grail.

But Feirefis was baptized and became a Christian, and wedded Repanse de Schoie, the Grail-bearer, and went back to his own land, where his wife bare him a son who was named Prester John.

Wolfram's version of the Perceval legend calls for little comment here. It is on the whole the most coherent and complete version of the hero's career which we possess. Chrêtien's poem breaks off in the middle of the second Gawain section, and therefore only gives Perceval's history up to his meeting with the Hermit; his continuators spin out the story to an inordinate length, and we have altogether four accounts of visits paid by Perceval to the Grail castle.

There is no such unanimity as to the final fate of the hero as prevails in the various versions of the Siegfried story; nor has the Perceval legend undergone the historical development which has left so strong an impress on the Teutonic myth. It seems exceedingly probable

that the version of the hero's birth and parentage which Wolfram followed was coloured by historical facts; and, as we shall see presently, the order of the Grail knights, which forms so important a feature of the drama, and is only found in Wolfram, was probably suggested by the order of the Knights Templars; but these exceptions cannot be held to have affected the mythical nature of the legend as a whole. The framework of the story belongs, however, to a later date than does the Siegfried-saga; there is little or no trace of the supernatural element, the free intermingling of the gods in the affairs of men, which is so marked a characteristic of the Northern legend. The religious element in the story of Perceval is distinctively Christian, and, as we shall see, it is through the medium of Christianity that Wagner has restored to his hero the divine nature undoubtedly his by origin.

Parsifal

THE DRAMA

CHAPTER VIII

Parsifal

ARGUMENT

In the castle of Monsalvat, in the mountains of Northern Spain, the Holy Grail, the Cup of the Last Supper, and the Spear with which the side of the Saviour was pierced on the Cross, are guarded by the Order of Grail Knights, ruled by their king Amfortas, son of Titurel, to whose care in the first instance the sacred relics were committed. In the valley beneath Monsalvat the enchanter, Klingsor, has erected a magic castle and garden, and, furious at the refusal of Amfortas to admit him as one of the Order, devotes himself to the task of corrupting and ensnaring the Grail Knights. Amfortas himself has been seduced by the charms of an unnamed sorceress, and not only robbed of the Holy Spear, but in the struggle wounded by the weapon. The wound will yield to no known remedy, but the Grail oracle has declared that healing shall come through 'a pure Fool,' wise through fellow-suffering.

Such is the explanatory account given by Gurnemanz, a knight of the Grail, to his attendant squires, at the commencement of the drama. Kundry, the self-appointed messenger of the Grail, a wild and fantastic figure, breaks in upon the scene with a flask of healing balsam from Arabia; but king and knight are alike aware that no means of healing, save that foretold by the Grail, will be of any avail.

The knights bear Amfortas to the lake for refreshment; and while the king watches with interest the flight of a wild swan, the bird falls, transfixed by an arrow from the bow of Parsifal. Taxed with the deed, the lad avows it gleefully, but when Gurnemanz' remonstrance convinces him of the cruelty of his action, he is struck with remorse, and, breaking his bow, throws

it and the quiver from him. Asked who he is, and whence he comes, Parsifal can give no satisfactory answer; but Kundry declares her knowledge of his parentage: he has been brought up in the woods 'as a fool' by his widowed mother, who has died of grief at his desertion. The lad, overcome with rage at Kundry's mocking tone, makes a furious attack upon her, but is checked by Gurnemanz. The knight, thinking he recognises in the new-comer the *Fool* of the prophecy, bids him accompany him to the Grail Feast. Kundry sinks down, overcome by heavy slumber, against which she struggles in vain. The scene changes to the temple of the Grail, where the mystic relic is to be unveiled, in the presence of the knights, by the king.

Amfortas, to whom the sight of the Grail brings renewed suffering, at first shrinks from his task, but, urged by the voice of his father, Titurel, who is himself preserved in life by the sight of the Grail, he unveils the cup, blessing with it the bread and wine, which thus become possessed of a miraculously sustaining power, and, as such, are partaken of with reverence by the Brotherhood. Parsifal remains a spectator of the solemn Feast, but, when questioned by Gurnemanz at the conclusion, shows no sign of comprehension of what has passed, and is driven by him with contempt from the temple.

Klingsor, aware that in Parsifal he has a foe whom it is essential to his plans to disarm and render powerless, summons to his aid Kundry (who having once vainly tempted Klingsor is now in his power, compelled to work his will), and bids her exercise on Parsifal the charms which have proved so fatal to Amfortas. Parsifal, drawn by Klingsor's spells to the castle, and having overcome by his valour the recreant knights of the Grail who guard it, enters the magic garden, and is at first enchanted, and afterwards repelled, by the fascinations of the Flower Maidens who inhabit it. Kundry's entrance puts them to flight, and by recalling to the lad's memory his name, and working upon his affection for his mother, she almost bends him to her will. But her kiss awakens in Parsifal a comprehension of Amfortas' sin and his own danger, and he steadfastly repells the temptress; Kundry summons Klingsor to her aid, and with the intention of slaying Parsifal he flings the Holy Spear at the lad; but the weapon hovers in the air above his head, and Parsifal seizing it in his hand, and making the sign of the cross, Klingsor's castle falls in ruins to the ground.

Amfortas, shrinking from the agony of his wound, refuses to unveil the Grail; the Brotherhood, deprived of their mystic food, become weakened and demoralised; Titurel dies; and Gurnemanz seeks refuge in a hermitage from the impending ruin of the Order. To him, on Good Friday morning, arrive, first Kundry, in the garb of a penitent, silent, but desirous as ever of serving the Grail; then Parsifal, grown to manhood, fully armed, and bearing the Spear, which through all his wanderings he has preserved unharmed. Cursed by Kundry in the previous act, he has been till now unable to find the Grail Castle, and is overcome with grief on learning the strait to which the Brotherhood is reduced. Gurnemanz assures him that he has conquered the curse, and anoints him king of the Grail. In his kingly office Parsifal first baptizes Kundry, and then, assuring her of redemption, gives her the kiss of absolution. The three repair to the Grail Temple, where, at the funeral of his father, Amfortas has promised to unveil the Grail; but when the moment arrives he refuses to fulfil his promise, renounces his royal office, and demands death at the hands of the indignant knights. Gurnemanz and Parsifal enter; and Parsifal with a touch of the Spear heals Amfortas, and, assuming the office the latter has renounced, unveils the Grail, while the knights kneel in silent adoration, and Kundry falls dead at his feet.

The Grail Castle—Its position—Original significance of visit—Titurel—Gurnemanz—Wagner's treatment of the legend—Amfortas—The Fisher-King—The Bleeding Lance—Identification with the Spear of Longinus—Variations of 'Grail' talisman—The swan episode, its source—Parsifal—His relation to Siegfried—The Grail Feast—Origin of the name—Helinandus—Departure of hero from castle—Klingsor—Kundry, Orgeluse, Herodias—The Magic Garden—Philosophical and mystical conception of hero's character—Wolfram's treatment of the legend—The Good Friday episode—Trevrezent—The old knight—The healing of Amfortas—Concluding remarks.

THE world in which the actors of this, Wagner's latest, drama move is no less mysterious, no less

remote from the world of fact than are the heaven and earth of the drama we have just discussed; but yet there is an essential difference between them. The mystery of the one is dark and terrifying, overshadowed by the gloom of an impending and inevitable catastrophe, the atmosphere is unfamiliar and at times oppressive; but here, though there be mists, the air is clearer, the mystery is that of Christian mysticism, and the shadows are illumined by the light of Faith and Love.

The keynote of the drama is struck in the peace of the opening scene; the repose of the Grail watchers, the solemn call to prayer from the castle, and the rising sun flashing the lake mists in the background.

Wagner has followed his source in placing the mysterious castle in the midst of a forest, and representing its discovery as a task in which human skill and energy are unavailing. Both in the poem and in the drama the guidance must come from above; and the fact that Wagner apparently considers the guiding power to be the Grail itself, while Wolfram believes the guidance to come directly and immediately from God, is apparently due to the more definitely Christian character ascribed to the Grail by the dramatist.

The name of the castle, 'Monsalvat,' is of course derived from the Monsalväsch of the *Parzival* (a

name peculiar to this version of the legend), where the derivation seems to be 'Mont Sauvage,' from the wild and lonely character of the surrounding district, a feature emphasised in the poem; but some scholars would explain the terms rather as signifying Mount of Healing (or Salvation), a rendering to which Wagner, from the form given to the name, seems to incline.

As to its locality Wolfram is by no means explicit: he certainly never says it is in Northern Spain, where Wagner places it; according to his statements it was within thirty-six hours' ride from Nantes. Writers later than Wolfram, however, do locate the Grail Castle in Spain, and the idea seems to have originated with the writer of *Der jüngere Titurel*, a poem which deals very fully with the Grail and its guardians, and, long attributed to Wolfram, is now known to be the work of a certain Albert von Scharffenburg, a very inferior poet.

This location of the Grail Castle in Spain is of course favoured by those scholars who regard the Grail myth as of Oriental origin, and the Spanish Moors the medium of communication to Europe; but as a matter of fact there is practically no evidence to connect the Grail with Spain, saving the statement, which Wolfram refers, and probably correctly, to his French source, that the legend of

the Grail was originally found in an Arabic MS. at Toledo. The truth of this statement may be gauged by the fact that the same MS. is stated to have contained the story of *Parzival*, the Aryan-Celtic origin of which is beyond doubt.[1] It is much more in accordance with the general indications of the legend to believe that the poets imagined the castle to be situated in the north-west of France.

But in the process of development which the legend has undergone, the nature of the castle to which the hero pays at first an abortive, and afterwards a successful, visit has passed through various transformations. At first it probably symbolised the abode of the departed, and was as such identical with the castle of Brynhild which figures in the Thidrek-saga and the Nibelungen-lied; and the hero's task was to break the spell of death or slumber binding the inhabitants. In the performance of this task certain talismans not infrequently played an important part; gradually these talismans became Christianised; and now in the Grail legends we have *two* castles—one, that of the Grail, the other, retaining its pre-Christian character, being known by varying names, the Castle of Maidens, the Château Merveil, or, as here, Klingsor's Castle. Such a bespelled castle is

[1] Cf. *Parzival*, Books viii. and ix.

undoubtedly an original and essential feature of the Perceval story.[1]

The *Parzival* gives no account of the building of Monsalväsch, such as Wagner puts into the mouth of Gurnemanz, but simply speaks of Titurel as being first king and ruler of the Grail and its knights; but elsewhere Wolfram is more explicit. Among the works which the poet-knight has left are poems, or songs, dealing with the loves of Sigune and Schionatulander, four in all, but critics are doubtful whether more than the two first can be rightly ascribed to Wolfram. In the first of these poems, which are classed together under the name of *Titurel*, we find the old king, oppressed with the infirmities of age, resigning his kingdom to his son Frimutel, and telling him that he received the Grail from the hands of angels, that he was the first mortal to whose charge it was committed, and that the rules for the order of Grail knights were found on the mystic stone.[2] There is no mention of the Spear here, nor of the building of Monsalväsch, the reason probably being that both castle and weapon were older than the Grail myth, and the writer accepted them as he found them.

[1] For the varying visits of the hero, or his parallel, Gawain, to the Magic Castle, cf. *Studies in the Legend of the Holy Grail*, chap. vii.

[2] The *Titurel* has been translated into Modern German by Simrock, and is published with the *Parzival*.

It is doubtful whether the *Titurel* preceded or followed the *Parzival*; probably the latter, and Wolfram's intention was to fill up lacunæ in the history of Sigune, who plays an important part in the *Parzival*. Its statements agree with those of the more important work, and a common source is evidently at the root of both.

The old knight Gurnemanz, who is so prominent in the drama, is also a characteristic figure in the original Perceval legend, where his office is to instruct the hero in knightly customs and bearing—instruction of which he has much need. The Welsh (*Peredur*) version represents this character as identical with the Fisher-King, and as uncle to the hero; but he is, as a rule, distinct from both, and the relationship of uncle rather pertains to the Hermit, also an essential character of the legend, whose office it is to direct the hero's spiritual development, whereas the old knight's teaching is directed rather to his outward bearing (combined in the case of Gurnemanz of Graharz with a good deal of ethical teaching).

In Chrêtien's poem the name of the knight is Gonemans de Gelbort; Gerbert, one of Chrêtien's continuators, calls him Gornumant, of which form Gurnemanz is evidently the German rendering. It will be seen that in the drama Wagner has united the characters of these two instructors in the person of his rather didactic old knight: the

Gurnemanz of the *First* Act answering to Gurnemanz of Graharz, who appears in the Third Book of the poem and not again, though he is frequently alluded to as a model of knightly wisdom, skill and courtesy; the Gurnemanz of the *Third* Act answering to the Hermit Trevrezent, who in the Ninth Book of the poem unfolds to Parzival the mystery of the Grail, and restores him to faith in God.

And here it may be well to remark that Wagner's treatment of the Perceval legend differs in some essential particulars from his treatment of the other legends he has dramatised; he has handled it with far more freedom and boldness, and, while adhering faithfully to the *spirit* of the original, he has recast the incidents with great gain to the dramatic form, and in more than one detail with a happy insistence on what was probably an original feature of the legend. The result of this treatment has been that, though the story of Parzival is really longer and more full of incident than is that of Siegfried, the salient points are so happily brought out, and the balance of the whole is so well preserved, that, though treated in *one* drama instead of in *two*, it in no way suffers from compression. It *is* a new rendering of an old myth, but the new is so completely in harmony with the old that the nineteenth century version may be regarded rather as an illustrative

and illuminative commentary on the twelfth century legend, than as an independent rendering. So far from either losing in interest when compared with the other, they gain when placed in juxtaposition; and Wagner's Parsifal becomes more real, more virile, and less of a type, when we connect him with Wolfram's intensely human and most lovable hero; while we scarcely grasp the full beauty of Wolfram's Parzival till we see the spiritual interpretation of which his story is susceptible.

To return to the drama, that part of the First Act which precedes the entrance of the hero may be regarded as introductory to the story, and the action, which is comparatively slight, is not based on any traditional ground; it is to the characters, rather than to the incidents, that our attention should be directed.

Kundry, who here appears for the first time, will be better discussed later, when we can take her character, complex in source and development, as a whole. So also Klingsor, who is as yet only a name; nor are either Kundry or Klingsor so essential and traditional a part of the legend as is Amfortas. The Fisher-King, the wounded lord of the Grail, appears in every version of the Grail myth; in the English *Sir Percyvelle*, in which the Grail does not appear, alone is he missing. Belonging to that part of the Perceval legend which

has been most strongly and directly affected by the development of the Grail myth, the character of the wounded king has now become so closely associated with the Christian talisman, that even when the earlier form of the legend has become obscured, and Perceval himself has ceased to be *par excellence* the hero of the quest, the wounded king, the Rich Fisher (varying names for the same character), still retains his connection with the object of that quest.

As a rule the king is represented as an old man; that Anfortas, in the *Parzival*, appears in the prime of life and manly beauty is due to the youth-bestowing powers of the Grail; Trevrezent, the Hermit, who is spoken of throughout as an aged man, is Anfortas' *younger* brother. In his representation of the Grail king, Wagner has, on the whole, followed the indications of his source; one generation has been dropped out, and Amfortas appears as Titurel's son, and not his grandson, thus heightening the tragic effect of the king's refusal to unveil the Grail; and the relationship between himself and Parsifal no longer exists. The distinctive feature of Wolfram's version, and that which has given Wagner the hint for the colouring 'motif' of his drama, lies in the fact that he represents Anfortas as wounded in punishment for an unlawful love; in other versions the king is wounded in battle, or acci-

dentally, by handling a mysterious sword destined for the use of another. This change, thoroughly in harmony with the high spiritual and ethical treatment which raises Wolfram's version of the legend so immeasurably above those of the French poets, has been utilised by Wagner to the great benefit of the character of Amfortas, which in the drama possesses a significance altogether lacking in the legend.

Why Wagner changed the name of the king from *An*fortas to *Am*fortas does not appear: the original form is supposed to have been derived from the French *Enfertez*=the sick man, with Provençal ending *as*; names derived from Provençal French being a marked feature in Wolfram's poem.

In the account of the weapon with which the king has been wounded Wagner departs boldly from his source, and from what was almost certainly the oldest form of the story. For we are here confronted with what is evidently one of the original features of the legend; in most of the earlier forms, *e.g.* in Chrêtien, in *Peredur*, and in the *Perceval*, we find a Bleeding Lance accompanied by another talisman, which latter is eventually identified with the Grail. The lance is in Chrêtien the subject of a longer digression and explanation than is the Grail itself; and while Perceval goes in quest of the Grail, and

to ask the question which shall release the wounded king, Gawain goes in search of the lance.

The identification of the lance with the spear of Longinus seems to be a later development, due perhaps to the Christianising of its companion, the Grail, talisman. The finding, at Antioch in 1198, of a spear which the Crusaders identified as the weapon of the Passion, doubtless aided this transformation; but the lance was already a feature of the story, and, as the varying forms of the *Conte del Graal*, the *Peredur*, and the *Parzival* (when the accompanying talisman is (*a*) an enigmatic object of gold set with precious stones; (*b*) a dish with a bleeding head upon it; (*c*) a stone) would indicate, had a well-marked character of its own which rendered it slower to be affected by Christian influence than was the talisman less directly connected with the story.

We not infrequently meet with the statement, in print, that it was Chrêtien de Troyes who first identified the lance with the spear of Longinus, and the Grail with the vessel of the Last Supper; but both these statements are incorrect. True, the lance *is* so spoken of in the introduction to Chrêtien's poem, and lance and Grail are alike Christian symbols in the mind of Chrêtien's continuators; but the introduction is no less the work of a hand other

than Chrêtien's, than is the continuation (or, to be more correct, continuations), and he himself gives no account of the origin of either.

The fact seems to be that the lance was, as Wolfram represents, the weapon with which the king was wounded; and though Wagner has radically changed the character of the weapon, yet in representing the Spear, rather than the Grail, as the object of the hero's quest, and the animating motive the desire of healing the maimed king, he is probably reproducing with fidelity original features of the story. No one can quarrel with Wagner for having represented both Spear and Grail under the more fully developed Christian character in which they are most familiar to us; the fact that he has done so bears out the contention advanced above, that in the *Parsifal* Wagner has been singularly happy in emphasising the spiritual significance of the legend without detriment to its original form.

We may probably look upon the lake to which Amfortas is borne for refreshment after his sleepless night as a retention of the original feature that he is met by the hero while engaged in fishing. Wagner has altogether dropped the traditional title of 'the Fisher-King,' the meaning of which is not easy to discover. It would be easy to hold that, as Wolfram says, he is called the Fisher-King from the fact that, owing to

his maimed condition, it is the only pastime in which he can indulge; but as a matter of fact the reverse seems to be the case, and the romances represent the king as fishing in order to account for a name the real origin of which has been forgotten.[1]

The episode of the swan, with which the hero makes his entry upon the scene, was doubtless suggested by a beautiful passage in the poem, where Wolfram depicts the child Parzival as slaying the birds in pure thoughtlessness, and then overwhelmed by remorse for the harm he has unwittingly done:

'But when the feathered songster of the woods at his feet lay dead,
In wonder and dumb amazement he bowed down his golden head,
And in childish wrath and sorrow tore the locks of his sunny hair;

. . . . . .

—and his heart was with sorrow filled,
And the ready tears of childhood flowed forth from their fountains free
As he ran to his mother, weeping, and bowed him beside her knee.
"What aileth thee, child?" quoth the mother, "but now wast thou gay and glad";
But, childlike, he gave no answer, scarce wist he what made him sad!'[2]

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[1] For the Fisher-King, cf. *Studies on the Legend of the Holy Grail*, chap. viii.

[2] Cf. *Parzival*, Book iii.

The identification of the *swan* as the bird of the Grail is a later feature, due to the connection with the myth of the swan-knight, who, in the latest forms of the story, became identified with Lohengrin, Parzival's son, and appointed heir to the Grail kingdom. The bird of the Grail is, more correctly, the *Dove*, the badge of the Grail knights in the poem as in the drama; but Wolfram alone knows of this feature, and we cannot consider it as part of the original legend.

In the account of Parsifal's parentage and upbringing, as drawn out by Gurnemanz, Wagner has adhered to Wolfram's statements, which probably represent very accurately the traditional version.

As to the hero's parentage a good deal of diversity exists; the name of his father varies in every version; his mother is anonymous, save in the *Parzival* and the English *Sir Percyvelle*; in this latter she is sister to King Arthur. The versions vary somewhat as to the circumstances of his father's death, whether it was previous to the birth of the hero or shortly afterwards; as in the case of Siegfried, the former seems to be the original version. All accounts, however, agree in representing Perceval as the son of a widowed mother, brought up by her in the woods in entire ignorance of his birthright, devoid of the knightly training fitted to his

rank; and as being possessed of great bodily strength and swiftness of foot, being able to overtake the beasts of the forest and slay them single-handed.

If we compare this with the account of Siegfried's boyhood, as extracted from the different versions, we shall see at once how close a resemblance exists between the heroes; though the main characteristic of Perceval, his extreme simplicity and *naïveté*, bordering on foolishness, is lacking in Siegfried.

This feature, absent in the tales of the other 'Expulsion' heroes, would seem to be a part of the specially Celtic development of the Formula, and may be counted among the 'folk-lore' features characterising the Perceval legend. We shall understand this if we recall the many folk-tales in which the simplicity of the hero is a leading trait,—the *Dummling Märchen*.[1]

Parsifal's account of his having been attracted from home by the sight of men in armour is in accordance, not only with Wolfram's account, but with all the older forms of the legend, though Wagner has omitted the real cause of his departure, *i.e.* his desire for knighthood at the hands of King Arthur. And here we touch a point in which Wagner differs from all the previous relaters

[1] Another instance is the episode of the blood-drops on the snow, related in Book vi. of the poem, passed over by Wagner.

of the legend: in the drama Parsifal knows nothing of Arthur and his court; the mention of Gawain (Gawan) in the First Act is the only trace left of the connection. And this silence is not merely defensible, but is a subject of congratulation, not alone on the ground of the greater simplicity of dramatic construction which was thus secured, but because it becomes evident, when we study the legend closely, that Perceval's connection with King Arthur is in reality extremely slight, and his story was almost certainly of independent origin. The one Arthurian hero with whom the earliest forms of the legend connect him is Gawain, who was undoubtedly himself the hero of an independent cycle of adventures. The Perceval and Gawain legends seem to have come into contact with each other *before* the full development and recognition of the Grail as a Christian symbol; and it seems not improbable that it was through the medium of the Perceval-saga that the Grail first became connected with the original Arthurian legend, the popularity of which eventually caused it to become a literary Aaron's rod, which swallowed up more or less effectually all contemporary legends. Between the development of the Grail-myth on the one hand, and the growth of the Arthurian legend on the other, Perceval and Gawain as independent heroes have well-nigh suffered extinction. The Perceval of King Arthur's

court is a very emasculated version of the Perceval of the Aryan folk-tale, and we have every reason to be grateful to Wagner for restoring him to his original independent position.

But to return to the drama: Parsifal's whole bearing in this First Act is entirely in accordance with the romances, which in some instances represent him as even more unconventional and discourteous in manner than Wolfram depicts him. His sudden outburst of wrath and attack on Kundry on hearing of his mother's death may be paralleled by the outburst of unreasoning anger in which the Parzival of the poem slays Ither of Gaheviess, who is really guiltless of any wrong against him. It may be noted that in the legend Perceval does not learn the fact of his mother's death till considerably later, from the lips of the Hermit. Here it will be interesting to compare Parsifal as we meet him at the outset of his career with Siegfried as represented in old Danish Helden-lieder. The following is a translation of the text of one of these 'lieder' as given by Rassmann in vol. i. of his *Deutsche Heldensage*:—

'Sivord (Sigurd) smote his stepfather to death, for the welfare of his mother; and now would he ride to court and try his fortune—so gaily goes Gram beneath Sivord.

'It was Sivord, the gallant lad, who stood before his

mother: "Which is best—shall I ride from thee or go afoot?" "Thou shalt not go afoot if a horse may bear thee; I will give thee that horse that men call Gram.' They led forth the good steed; he bare a golden bridle, his eyes shone as the morning star, and fire sprang from his bit.

'Sivord sat himself on the good steed, he bound on his shining helmet. His mother followed him far from the court, and her mother heart was grieved. His mother followed him far from the court, she was sore at heart. "Have a care of the steed Gram, for he knoweth many wiles." Gram went forth from thence —'twas not in all well done—for even though the lad sat fast in the saddle he sweated the red blood.

'Fifteen nights and fifteen days the steed sped over hill, and vale; he came to a high house, and all the doors were fast closed.

'The king, he stood on the high ramparts, and looked forth into the distance. "And there I see a drunken man, but his horse he can ride full well. 'Tis either a drunken courtier, his horse he can ride full well, or 'tis Sivord, my sister's son, and he hath been in strife."

'Gram took the bit in his teeth, and he sprang over the ramparts.

'Thereupon they feared, women and maidens, e'en as many as were within. And they paled, women and maidens, fair under their scarlet robes. And the king went joyfully towards the dear son of his sister. "I rede ye well, all ye my folk, treat Sivord with kindness. I tell ye of a truth he will bear no mocking."

'"So gaily goes Gram 'neath Sivord."'

Now, if this fragment were given for the first

time into the hands of any one conversant with the history of the two heroes, with a request to fill in the name, the chances are that we should find the adventure ascribed to Perceval, and not to Siegfried. Traces of the Siegfried legend have been found in Ireland, and it is not impossible that in its later form it did come into contact with, and was influenced by, the Arthurian cycle; but the real explanation of such a resemblance as this, existing as it does between the oldest form of the Perceval story and a lay which in the opinion of many scholars is founded upon the earliest Eddaic version of the Siegfried-saga, seems to be, as suggested before, that there is a common mythic element at the root of both stories, and that, however differently the legends have developed, the two heroes were originally *one*.

We now reach the visit of the hero to the Grail Castle, a point equally important in legend and drama, and here the fully developed Christian significance of the relic is clearly brought forward and emphasised. In connection with this, there are two points that should be noted: (*a*) that this Christian symbolism was a matter of gradual development; (*b*) that it is rather with the Grail in its transitional stage that Perceval is connected. When the Grail becomes fully accepted as *the* Christian symbol, the relic of the Last Supper,

it is Galahad, and not Perceval, who is the hero of the quest.

Chrêtien de Troyes, though he speaks of the Grail as 'holy,' '*Toute sainte cose est li Graaus*,' gives no reason *why* it is so; Wolfram's Grail is a stone, 'holy' on account of its celestial origin, but in neither case is the talisman necessarily and distinctively *Christian*.

In both poems a 'Host' is mentioned, this being in Chrêtien's poem the sole sustenance of the Fisher-King's father, a very enigmatical personage; but it is not at all clear in the French poem what is the exact connection between Host and Grail; while in Wolfram it appears that the Grail derives its virtue from the Host, which is brought down from heaven once a year, on Good Friday—the only trace of a Christian connection, which may here have been suggested by the Host. In the closely agreeing Welsh version the Grail is not mentioned at all; its equivalent is a dish with a bleeding head on it, and the significance is distinctly non-Christian, partaking as it does of the nature of a vendetta.

Taking into consideration the conflicting evidence of these versions, which otherwise agree so closely, and bring out so clearly those features of the hero's career which mark him as belonging to an Aryan and prehistoric type; and the evident ignorance of both Chrêtien and Wolfram of

any real 'Grail tradition,'—it seems impossible to doubt that that tradition, beautiful as it is, was of comparatively late origin.

But the identification as a Christian symbol once complete, the Grail could never again be dissociated from the results of such identification; and Wagner could hardly have done other than represent the Grail under the guise in which we have learned to know it, while still retaining in great measure the primitive and pre-Christian characteristics of the original Grail hero.

Correctly speaking, however, the Grail does not seem, even in its Christian form, to have been a cup or chalice, but rather a *dish*; that from which our Lord and His Apostles ate at the Last Supper. In the chronicle of Helinandus (which concludes with the year 1204) we find the word Grail derived from *gradalis* or *gradale*, 'a dish, wide and but a little deep' (*scutella lata et aliquantulum profunda*), in which at a sacred feast the morsels, or offerings, were placed in order and regular gradation. The Provençal word *Gral*, to this day, signifies a *dish*. It was the secondary use of the Grail, as the vessel which received the blood flowing from the Saviour's wounds, which caused it to become eventually identified with the chalice of the Mass, and represented as a cup.

It is somewhat curious that none of the romances give a satisfactory derivation of the word; the

quotation given above from Helinandus has been accepted as the most reasonable, but Helinandus did not himself write any of the versions, and is merely commenting on the work of others. The majority of writers give no solution at all, but in two instances we find a curious punning explanation suggested—

> 'Par droit Graal l'apelera ;
> Car nus le Graal ne verra,
> Ce croi-je, qu'il ne li agrée' ;[1]

a solution which Helinandus refers to with some contempt.[2]

The fact that Wagner has adopted this distinctively Christian form of the legend has, of course, strongly affected the visit of his hero to the Grail Castle ; and the Feast, which in the poem has a purely social character, overshadowed by the incident of the Bleeding Lance, but mysterious only through the provision of food by the Grail (which should perhaps be called magical, rather than mysterious), in the drama assumes the character of a religious ceremony, an Agape or Love-Feast.[3]

[1] Nutt, *Studies*, p. 76.

[2] The rendering, at one time popular, of the word as Sangréal (royale) is manifestly incorrect. The earliest forms are Li Graal, Gral, Graaux, Greal, Gréail, *minus* the prefix of Saint. Sangréal in one word is distinctly a later form.

[3] To this day members of the Greek Church receive, as distinct from the Sacrament, bread which has been blessed by the priest ; and the silver knife with which the sacrament is divided is called 'The Holy Spear.'

In the poem Parzival does not attend the Grail Feast as the wild, untutored lad who arrives at the court of King Arthur (a character which he retains through the greater part of the drama), but as a knight, taking part in the festivity with the other knights. In poem and drama he alike fails to understand the true significance of what passes around him, but in the drama Wagner lays stress rather on the cause than on the effect, *i.e.* he has emphasised the spiritual and intellectual dulness which in the legend causes the hero to omit the question, rather than the fact of his failure to do so. In the drama it is made abundantly clear that Parsifal's fault lies in his lack of spiritual perception, which renders him unable to grasp the true meaning of what he dimly apprehends (perhaps also in the cowardice which leads him to shrink from facing a spiritual experience strange and terrifying to the natural man); in the poem it is for his failure to ask the question that he is put to open shame, and, inasmuch as he is strictly adhering to Gurnemanz's instructions (in so far as he comprehends them, which is in the *letter* only), one is not surprised to find Parzival strongly resenting the apparent injustice of Kondrie's attack upon him. It is not till the Hermit points out that the failure was caused by sin, unrepented and unabsolved, that we grasp the real meaning of the incident.

In the legend Parzival is not, as in the drama, driven from the hall with contumely, but awakes in the morning to find himself alone in the castle, all the inhabitants having vanished; and it is as he rides forth from the castle that an unseen hand raises the drawbridge, and the voice of one unseen pours mockery upon him for his failure to ask the mystic question:

'Goose that thou art, ride onward, to the sun's hate hast thou been born!
Thy mouth hadst thou thought to open, of these wonders hadst asked thine host,
Great fame had been thine. But I tell thee now hast thou this fair chance lost!'—

words in which we find the source of Gurnemanz's taunt, cast by Wagner in more homely and proverbial form. The whole incident has an unmistakable 'folk-lore' flavour about it, though perhaps it is more common to find that not the folk alone, but castle or palace itself, has vanished, and the hero wakes to find himself on the bare ground.

With the Second Act we reach the most important deviation which Wagner has made from the original form of the story; the substitution of a sharp and sudden test of his hero's purity and steadfastness, for the long period of trial and slow development which the poem assigns to him. There is no doubt that, dramatically, the story gains much by the change, but as

regards the character of the hero himself the advantage is not so obvious; to some minds Wolfram's method may appear to have been productive of the better result, and his Parzival will be held to be on the whole a more natural, lifelike, and vivid piece of character-drawing than is Wagner's hero—though, of course, the symbolical nature of the drama may be largely accountable for this.

And here we find that Wagner in the ethical 'motif' of his drama has followed the later or Galahad versions of the Grail story, with their exaltation of the virtue of purity (generally identical in the minds of the compilers with celibacy) above all other virtues, rather than the original or Perceval version, wherein the hero is generally represented as a married man. But the change is in the outward form of the story rather than in its spirit; for Wolfram's Parzival, with his reverence for Kondwiramur's maiden modesty, and his loyal adherence to his marriage vow under the strain of prolonged absence from his wife, and the repeated temptations incidental to a state of society in which such vows were but lightly held, is no whit less pure than is Wagner's virgin youth repelling the advances of Kundry in the marvellous temptation scene. As suggested above, it is not the character of Parsifal which gains from this change of 'motif' and incident, but

rather those of Klingsor and Kundry, both of whom are infinitely more interesting in the drama than in the poem.

In the *Parzival* Klingsor never appears personally; he is lord of the Château Merveil, that mysterious Magic Castle which in one form or another appears so often in the Grail legends, and which in the poem seems to be regarded rather as a parallel to the Grail Castle than its opposite, as suggested in the drama. It is not Klingsor and his captives, but King Arthur and his court, who, in the *Parzival*, form the worldly and carnal foil to the spiritual conception of the Grail and its knights.

The character of Klingsor is, so far as we can tell, peculiar to the German version of the legend. One of the continuators of the *Conte del Graal* relates the story of a certain King Carduel of Nantes and a magician, which, in some features, strongly resembles the account given by Wolfram of Klingsor; but this is the only parallel, and the name appears nowhere save in the *Parzival*. But for some reason difficult to discover the character took a strong hold of the popular mind, and Wolfram's magician seems to have become in the eyes of mediæval German writers as real and historical as Wolfram himself. In the *Wartburgkrieg* both are represented as taking part, and engaging in a riddling contest, in which Wolfram,

as he certainly ought to do, proves victorious. One tradition even represents Klingsor as a *bishop* —a curious transformation!

But nowhere does Klingsor appear as of so really evil a character as represented in the drama. Immoral he is, and to a certain degree revengeful, as his dealings in magic are by Wolfram, as by Wagner, ascribed to his desire to avenge his own well-deserved punishment upon others; but the dwellers in his Magic Castle are surrounded by luxury and splendour, and have nothing, save their separation from their friends, to complain of. Nor are they other than innocent in life. Orgeluse expressly states that Klingsor is both wise and courteous, and, moreover, strictly observant of his pledged word. For the dramatic presentment of Klingsor as an embodiment of evil, the sworn foe and opponent of the Grail king and his knights, Wagner is alone responsible; the Perceval legend has no traditional villain like Regin or Hagen in the Siegfried-saga. Nor is the Kondrie of the poem as closely connected with the magician—true, she visits the Magic Castle, but it is apparently at her own free will that she comes and goes; nor does Klingsor appear to be resident there. But the parallel of Kundry as represented in the drama will be sought for in vain elsewhere; the elements of her many-sided character are indeed present in the legend, but to Wagner

alone belongs the credit of having combined these scattered indications in a creation neither out of harmony with itself nor with its original elements—a conception as artistically true as it is dramatically powerful. Mr. Nutt well remarks, 'Kundry is Wagner's great contribution to the Perceval legend.'

For the rightful understanding of so complex a personality we must look beyond the poem which was Wagner's ostensible source, though we shall find that much is due to the indications of the *Parzival*, utilised by the dramatist with rare skill. Wagner's Kundry represents alike Wolfram's Kondrie, the loathly messenger of the Grail, and the Lady Orgeluse, the sometime love of Anfortas, in whose service he received his incurable wound, who offers herself to Parzival (who alone, of all knights, refuses to serve her for such guerdon), and finally marries Gawain. The messenger of the Grail figures in several versions of the story, her appearance being far more repulsive than could be represented on the stage, and in more than one instance we find that this hideous aspect is simply the result of a spell, and when the hero achieves the quest the damsel is released and transformed into surpassing beauty. The fact that Wolfram knows of a second Kondrie, Gawain's sister, resident in the Magic Castle, who is 'Kondrie *la Belle*,' seems to indicate that the Kondrie of

the *Parzival*, too, had originally this double character.

That Orgeluse, though clearly distinct from Kondrie, has also a supernatural origin, appears probable, both from her surpassing beauty and the fact that Gawain finds her beside a spring of water (a very general indication of the fairy nature of the lady), and also from her close connection with the Magic Castle; a connection which Mr. Nutt suggests was originally even closer than appears in the legend, the lady being not improbably the daughter of the magician to whom the castle belongs.

Therefore, in representing Kundry both as undergoing transformation from extreme ugliness to brilliant beauty, and as closely and intimately connected with Klingsor and his castle, Wagner is in all probability reproducing features which, if not originally united in the same person, are yet a very old and integral part of the legend.

But into this strange personality of Kundry are interwoven other elements, foreign to the Perceval legend, yet of great antiquity, and calculated to emphasise at once her unearthly nature and her close connection with the spiritual significance of the drama.

The names by which Klingsor invokes his slumbering tool—Herodias, Gundryggia—point

clearly to the mythical element in her character. Both names are known in Germany as appellations of the Wild Huntress: Gundryggia or Gundr is also the name of one of the Valkyrie, otherwise there appears to be no special legend attached to the character; but with Herodias this is not the case. There is a weird story which relates how the enmity of Herod's queen towards John the Baptist was really caused by the saint's rejection of her proffered love. When after death she would have covered the severed head with tears and kisses, it recoiled, and from the dead lips issued a blast of wind so powerful that Herodias was carried away by it, and like Dante's sinful lovers sweeps for ever onward before its resistless force.

This curious legend appears to owe its origin to a misunderstanding of Hrödes, one of the many names of Wotan, who, in his elementary character of Air, is the original Wild Huntsman. Among the many explanations traditionally given of the object of this mysterious chase we find the god represented as pursuing his flying bride; and *vice-versâ* the deserted goddess seeking her lost husband. This chase being closely connected with the summer solstice, *i.e.* with S. John's (Midsummer Day), the remembrance of the saint, coupled with the misunderstanding of the name, probably contributed to the evolution of this

quaint legend.[1] The effect of the introduction of this mythical element, so far as the drama is concerned, is to heighten the interest of the struggle between Kundry and Parsifal, which becomes not merely the struggle between evil and good, but specifically the struggle between evil and good as represented by Paganism and Christianity. Heathen and Christian myth are here brought into sharp opposition, the powers of the elements, the earliest object of worship, with the fully developed and mystical Christianity symbolised by the Grail.

The fact that Wagner hints at a legend similar to that of the Wandering Jew as connected with Kundry emphasises the identification which the name of Herodias has suggested; students of mythology will be well aware that there is a common origin for the two legends, and the 'Ewige Jude' and the 'Ewige Jäger' are, to say the least, very near relations. If Wagner, in adopting and laying such stress upon the temptation incident, has departed somewhat from the older form of the Perceval legend, if we must look for the poet's type of his hero rather in Galahad than in Parzival, it cannot be denied that he has treated the episode with a force and genius which raise it immeasurably above the level of any of the trials besetting the hero of the later Grail legends, and

[1] Cf. Simrock, *Deutsche Mythologie*, 'Herodias.'

this gain in interest is undoubtedly due to the greater prominence given to the character of Kundry. The conception of this wonderful Second Act may throughout be considered as the work of Wagner's genius; there are certainly hints and suggestions in Wolfram's poem which doubtless gave to Wagner the impulse of casting his drama in the particular form he chose, but they are but hints, and only a great dramatic genius could have made such use of them.

In the episode of Gawain and Orgeluse the lady bids the enamoured knight fetch her steed from a garden where it is tied beneath a tree, but to take no heed of any warning addressed to him by those within:

'There saw he many a maiden, and knights so brave and young,
And within that goodly garden so gaily they danced and sung.
. . . . . .
They cared for that lovely garden, on the greensward they stood or lay,
Or sat 'neath the tents whose shadow was cool 'gainst the sunlight's ray';

but the garden has no connection with the Magic Castle, nor are the dwellers in it other than 'good men and true.' We are told of no garden round the Château Merveil, and the introduction of the magic element and the Flower Maidens into this version of the legend is due to Wagner alone. But when we regard the symbolical character of

the drama, and the typical nature of the hero, so strongly emphasised in the last Act, we cannot but feel that there is a dramatic significance and propriety in Wagner's choice of the scene of Parsifal's trial which cannot be overlooked. Old theologians were wont to dwell lovingly upon the fact that a garden was the scene alike of man's Fall and of his Redemption; what more fitting than that Parsifal, the type of the Saviour of mankind, should be tempted, and conquer, in a garden? And here we touch what is the real inwardness, and to many minds will form the undying fascination, of this great drama, viz. the spiritual signification which Wagner has attached to the character of Parsifal; the mystical presentation of his legendary healing task; the identification of the hero of the Grail quest as a type of Christ.

What led Wagner so to remodel the legend? In the first place his aim was undoubtedly philosophical; deeply impressed by Schopenhauer's philosophy, he was desirous of embodying in dramatic form certain of the leading principles, or formulæ, of that philosophy. One of these, 'the renunciation of the will to live,' in other words, the sacrifice of self for the sake of another = altruism, lies at the basis of Wagner's conception of the drama.

But why did his choice fall on this special

legend, and why did he select its hero as his 'knight of compassion,' type of the only perfect sympathy and self-renunciation the world has known? Here we must give to Wolfram von Eschenbach his due meed of honour; it was his genius which had impressed on the hero of the Grail quest those characteristics which rendered him the fitting medium for Wagner's message to the world. Whether or no some part of the credit may be due to Wolfram's lost French source we are unhappily little likely now to learn; but the fact remains that in other versions of Perceval's career, closely agreeing though they may in the march of incident, we shall look in vain for the depth of insight, the wide charity, the recognition of the duty of love 'as a man to men,' which characterise the German Parzival.

The very form which Wolfram gives to the traditional question, differing as it does from all the other versions, is significant of the different spirit of the poem; elsewhere we find that the hero has to ask the wounded king, '*Whom serve they with the Grail?*' in the *Parzival* he asks, '*What aileth thee, mine uncle?*'—*i.e.* the Grail is to be won by an act expressive of love for, and sympathy with, a fellow-man; and when won it is to be used for the benefit of others. One of the objects of the Grail kingdom, according to Wolfram, is the training up and sending forth of

knights as rulers to those lands which through death or other mischance are in need of a king.

Throughout Gurnemanz's counsels to the young knight the duty of love and charity to his fellow-men is insisted upon; and there is a marked absence of the ecclesiastical narrowness, and spiritual selfishness, which mark the later stages of the Grail legend. We demand to-day, and rightly, that the hero who shall claim to be a type of the highest humanity, the union of God and man, shall himself be thoroughly human; no shadowy ascetic Galahad, standing apart from man's hopes and needs, can win or retain our sympathies; and Wagner showed, not merely a patriotic appreciation of his national literature, but a true comprehension of the spirit of the age, when he turned back to the earlier versions of the Grail legend, and chose for his last and greatest hero the Parzival of Wolfram von Eschenbach.

In the poem too, as in the drama, it is Kondrie who is the active agent in what is really the crisis of the hero's development; but it is not by her seductive temptation that he is lured to sin, but by her curses, as messenger of the Grail, deputed to punish the elect saviour, who has failed in his mission, that Parzival is shaken to the soul, and his childish faith in God, as the All-wise Ruler of the world, shattered. But in poem and drama alike a long period of wandering, and of vain

search for the Grail Castle, follows on the crisis. In the drama we are not told *how* long; in the poem the time is given with minute precision: 'four years and a half and three days' pass before Parzival meets with the hermit, Trevrezent, who proves to be his uncle, and whose counsels restore to him his lost faith in God. Nor does his trial end, as in the drama, with the meeting, though it cannot have been much prolonged, as we find him stating, as he rides to meet his wife, in the last Book of the poem, that he has been separated from her for 'well-nigh five years.'

The Good Friday meeting with the Hermit is undoubtedly part of the traditional story, and occurs both in the Welsh and in more than one French version; but nowhere is the incident treated so fully, or with such solemnity and dignity, as in the *Parzival*. Wolfram devotes the longest and, on the whole, the finest of his sixteen books (the ninth) to this episode, putting into Trevrezent's mouth a full account of the Grail (paralleled by Gurnemanz's recital in the First Act), besides an exposition of the plan of salvation, extremely characteristic of the theological teaching of the day.

There are, however, important differences here between poem and drama; Kondrie does not appear in the former, and Gurnemanz fills the *rôle* not only of Trevrezent but also of the pilgrim

knight who directs Parzival to the Hermit's cell. The reproach which Gurnemanz addresses to Parsifal, for bearing arms on Good Friday, is in the poem spoken by the knight.

An essential difference, too, is found in the fact that it is in this concluding Act that the spiritual significance of the hero's character and career becomes clearly manifest; here Parsifal is no longer, as in the poem, the absolved, but the absolver, and as a consequence of this change the entire Good Friday scene, as rendered by Wagner, is touched with a mystical beauty and tenderness which are indescribable, and have no dramatic parallel—it is, emphatically, *Charfreitags Zauber.*

The closing scene of the drama owes its suggestion directly to the poem. In a fine passage at the commencement of the last Book, Anfortas, despairing of cure, demands death at the hand of his knights, and reproaches them bitterly when, relying on the succour promised by the Grail, they refuse to yield to his prayers. He attempts himself to bring about the desired result by closing his eyes for eight days to the life-giving sight of the Grail, for it is one of the special features of the Grail as described by Wolfram that none beholding it can die within eight days of the sight. But bodily weakness conquers Anfortas's will; when borne by his knights before the Grail he cannot keep his eyes

closed, and is therefore preserved in life till the coming of Parzival.

It will be understood from this that the Grail is not veiled as in the drama, and neither Titurel nor the Grail knights are therefore involved, save through sympathy, in the tragedy of the king's suffering.

It is somewhat difficult to understand why Titurel, who beholds the Grail equally with the other inhabitants of the castle, should be represented by Wolfram as in extreme old age, while the other members of the family, Anfortas himself, and Repanse de Schoie, retain their youthful beauty. The reason probably is that the character was an original part of the story, and did not undergo modification with the varied developments of the Grail talisman.

In the healing of Amfortas the different character ascribed in poem and drama to the weapon with which he was wounded naturally affects the situation. The king, healed in the drama by the touch of the spear, is, in the legend, healed by the mysterious question, and at once becomes possessed of supernatural beauty, exceeding even that of Parzival.

He loses his kingdom, not as the result of a voluntary act of resignation on his part, but at the declared will of the Grail, which has foretold from the first that with the coming of the promised

knight and healer Anfortas shall lose his power; the reason being that he has transgressed the rules of the Grail Order by vowing himself to *Minne-dienst.*

'For if love the Grail king seeketh, other than he find writ,
'Tis a sin, and in sorrow and sighing full sore shall he pay for it.'

Not that the Grail king might not marry; we are expressly told that though the knights as a body might not do so, yet their king, and those who, like Lohengrin, were sent 'as king to a kingless land,' might take to themselves a wife. What seems to be meant is that the Grail would show on its surface the name of the chosen maiden, as it indicates by this means all those elected to its service. It is thus that Parzival is elected king; and, from the account of the oracle given by Gurnemanz in the First Act, it would seem that Wagner intended to preserve this characteristic feature of his source.

The same difference which we noted between the Grail feast of poem and drama in the First Act, obtains even more strongly in the closing scene; in the poem it is a social feast at which Parzival, reunited to his wife, presides as king, not a religious service in which he is less king than priest. Throughout, the effect of this last Act, with its Good Friday episode and closing scene, is, as hinted before, to reinstate the hero, by means of an element foreign to the original

legend, in the position which rightfully belongs to him, *i.e.* to emphasise Parsifal as a hero of divine origin, though that divinity had become very completely obscured. Regarded in this light, it must be conceded that Wagner's treatment of the Perceval legend has been happier in its results than in the case of the Siegfried-saga. If the essentials of a successful representation of an old-world myth be that it shall lose nothing of its old characteristics while it becomes charged with a fuller meaning, that body and soul shall be in harmony the one with the other, we must admit that Wagner succeeded more completely when, as in the *Parsifal*, he allowed the spirit to remould the incidents, than when, as in the *Ring* drama, he moulded the spirit to the form. If Wagner does not give us all the incidents in his hero's career, as related in his source, he yet impresses upon us the moral which those incidents convey. Wolfram represents his hero as 'a brave man, but slowly wise'; and the attainment of knowledge by suffering, of truest wisdom by compassion's power, is the task Wagner sets his hero. As a music-drama, the position assigned to Wagner's latest work may vary; as an attempt to retell an old legend with due reverence for its traditional form, and full sympathy for the modern spirit, the *Parsifal* will, in all probability, remain eternally unrivalled.

Lohengrin

THE LEGEND

CHAPTER IX

Lohengrin

Origin of the Swan-knight myth—Skeáf—Guillaume de Tyr—Early connection of Swan-knight with the Grail—Causes of popularity—German versions—Chevalier au Cygne—Lohengrin.

THE legend which lies at the root of this, by no means one of the greatest, but certainly one of the most attractive of the Wagner dramas, is distinctly less important, both from a mythical and a literary point of view, than are the two great legends we have already considered. Unlike Siegfried and Perceval, the Swan-knight, though the theme of many romances, is not the hero of any great national epic, nor indeed of any work of the first rank in literature. The *Parzival* is certainly the most important work which mentions him, and there his story is but briefly told in one hundred lines of the concluding Book. As a personality, the Swan-knight never seems to have taken real hold of the imagination of the folk; it was his action, rather than himself, that was immortalised.

From some points of view the legend is one easy of examination; it was extremely popular in the Middle Ages, and the numerous MSS. we possess differ but little in the main facts of the story, the variations being mostly in name and location, and this only within certain bounds. No task of weighing evidence and comparing different and often contradictory versions awaits us here; the real difficulty is the lack of testimony as to the development of the legend, how it came to assume the particular form in which we know it. We possess the germ, we have the fully developed flower, but the intermediate stages of growth have disappeared.

Scholars are now universally agreed that the origin of the Swan-knight story is to be found in the myth of Skeáf, the reputed ancestor of the Anglo-Saxons. This legend relates how to the shores of these, our own ancestors, there drifted a rudderless boat, in which, cradled on a sheaf of corn, and surrounded by arms and treasure, there lay a sleeping child. To this child the Angles gave the name of Skeáf, from the sheaf of corn on which he lay. Grown to manhood, he became their king, and from him they learned the arts of peace and of war. At length the king died, and obedient to his will they bare the body to the seashore, laid it again in the ship which had brought him hither, and the vessel and its burden drifted away

into the unknown distance.[1] From Skeáf sprang a mighty race of kings, and the folk were fain to believe that this mysterious ancestor of their rulers had been in truth a god.

Nor were the Angles the only race with whom this tradition was connected. Skeáf is known as the ancestor alike of the Danes and of the Langobardi; the Cynewulf MS. in the Exeter Chapter Library gives him as king of these last, and not of the Angles,—there is no doubt that we have here a manifestation of Odin.

This, then, is the germ of the Swan-knight legend, but it will be noted that it is the germ only: it is a child, and not a knight, who comes in the mysterious vessel; there is no mention of the swan, nor of the saving mission of the hero; nor, as noted above, are there any intermediate versions to lead us to determine *how* these features became characteristic of the story. We can only conjecture how these changes came about, and, as we shall see when we discuss the drama, the most probable conjecture seems to be that which refers the change to the identification of the certainly divine visitor with a god other than Odin, of whose personality both swan and mission are alike characteristic.

A proof of the extreme antiquity of the legend of Skeáf is thought by some scholars to be afforded

[1] Cf. Simrock, *Deutsche Mythologie*, p. 292.

by a statement of the historian Tacitus, that a legend was current among the Germans to the effect that Ulysses in his wanderings descended the Rhine, and built on its bank the city of *Asciburgium*. Now it is extremely unlikely that a legend dealing with a classical hero *was* current among the Germans, and the general opinion now is that Tacitus, who received the story at second or third hand, has confused a version of the Skeáf legend with the story of a hero more familiar to himself. Reiffenberg suggests that Asciburgium is a corruption of Asburg, the abode of the gods (*asen*).

However this may be, and whether the legend of Skeáf is older than the Christian era or not, there is a long gap before we come to the fully developed romance of the Swan-knight, as current in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Reiffenberg, in his exhaustive study of the cycle above referred to, states that the first mention of the story is found in the writings of Guillaume Archbishop of Tyre, born at Jerusalem, who flourished at the end of the twelfth century—he was dead in 1197. In discussing the parentage of Godfrey de Bouillon, Guillaume remarks that he passes over, as unworthy of serious comment, the 'Fable of the Swan,' 'though many consider it a true account of the hero's origin.' Helinandus, whose testimony to the Grail myth has already

been quoted, also makes mention of the story, but connects the knight with no special family, and locates the incident at Cologne.[1]

But all the earlier references to the legend deal with the story of the Swan-knight and his mission *only*, and not with the *märchen-haft* account of his birth and parentage which towards the end of the thirteenth century had become attached to it. There seems little doubt that in the tale of the *Chevalier au Cygne*, as related in the popular *Chansons de geste*, we have the union of two distinct stories, originally entirely independent of each other. Another change in the original form of the story, and one which probably preceded the addition of what we may call the 'seven swan folk-tale,' was the connection of the hero with the Grail myth. It is not very clear to whom this alteration was due; it has been customary to credit it to Wolfram von Eschenbach, who introduces the story at the end of his *Parzival*, giving the hero the name by which he is now best known, that of Loherangrin or Lohengrin. But Gerbert, one of the continuators of Chrêtien de Troyes, who certainly did not know Wolfram, and, if the date assigned to his interpolation be correct, wrote *before* Wolfram, also connects the Swan-knight

[1] Reiffenberg seems to doubt the authenticity of this statement. It is not found in any of the MSS. of the Chronicles, and only exists as a quotation. Cf. *Chevalier au Cygne*, Introduction.

with Perceval; and it therefore seems more probable that Wolfram found the statement in the French source to which he emphatically refers as his authority throughout, *i.e.* the lost poem of *Kiot the Provençal.* From internal evidence it appears almost certain that this poem could not have been written after 1189, and was probably anterior to that date, and it therefore seems most probable that the Grail connection was, as suggested above, earlier than has been usually supposed.[1] But if Wolfram did not invent the connection, it was doubtless due to him that this particular version of the Swan-knight story was adopted as the characteristic *German* form of the legend; the number of Parzival MSS. which have come down to us, a number greatly exceeding that of any other poem of the period, clearly point to the widespread popularity of Wolfram's great epic, and from the lines of the Lohengrin legend as laid down by him none of his successors seem to have cared to depart. The German versions, one and all, omit the 'seven swans' introduction—a significant fact, as the tale was by no means unknown in Germany; but, though differing in minor details,[2] all consider the Swan-knight as con-

[1] Cf. Excursus on Wolfram's source, vol. ii. of the English translation of the *Parzival.*

[2] Perhaps an exception should be made in the case of Konrad von Würzburg, who does not reveal the secret of his hero's birth. His version seems to be a compromise between the

nected with the Grail king; and the main interest of the story seems to have consisted in its being regarded as a development of the immensely popular Grail myth. Elsewhere the popularity of the legend seems to have been due to the genealogical use to which it lent itself. Reiffenberg suggests that it was first fitted into the history of Godfrey de Bouillon to fill a *lacuna* caused by the marriage of an ancestress with a knight distinguished for his valour rather than for his birth; and the legend seems to have played the same part in the history of other noble families—the Dukes of Cleves and of Brabant, among others, claimed the Swan-knight as their ancestor.

For our purpose it is the German versions which principally concern us, and these are: the account given in the last Book of the *Parzival*; *Der jüngere Titurel* (referred to in the last chapter), where the adventures of Lohengrin after leaving the Duchess of Brabant, and his final fate, are related; *Der Schwanen-ritter*, by Konrad von Wurzburg, a poem dating from about the end of the thirteenth century; and *Lohengrin*, a poem of about the same date (1260), the work of an unknown poet, probably a Bavarian. It is upon this last that Wagner has based his drama. Inasmuch

original Flemish and German versions. As the devoted admirer of Gottfried von Strassburg he would probably be less inclined to follow the lead of that writer's rival, Wolfram von Eschenbach.

as the romance of the *Chevalier au Cygne* has, in more than one detail, distinctly affected the drama, and it may be interesting to the reader to compare the two versions, it has been thought well to give an abstract of this as well as of the *Lohengrin*.

The Chevalier au Cygne

There was in olden time a king named Oriant, who reigned over the island of Lillefort. One day this king, who dearly loved hunting, went forth to the chase, when a white stag sprang up from the thicket and fled before the hunters; and the king followed swiftly after, till he found himself separated from his followers, and alone by a fountain. Then there came unto him a lady of surpassing beauty, who said she was queen of the forest, and rebuked the king for hunting in it against her will.

Oriant was smitten with the maiden's beauty, and besought her to become his wife; and she hearkened to him, and they returned together to Lillefort, where the marriage was celebrated with great pomp and feasting. But the king had a mother, named Matabrune, who was very wrathful that her son had married a damsel of whose birth nothing was known, and she thought in her mind how she might be revenged on Beatrix, the young queen.

After a time, when the king was absent, Beatrix gave birth to seven children, six sons and a daughter, each of whom bare a silver chain round their neck. But Matabrune stole away the babes ere the mother had seen them, and laid in their place seven young dogs; and gave the babes to a knight, and bade him take them to the wood and slay them there. When the knight saw how fair the children were, he durst not slay them, but wrapped them in his cloak, and laid them at the foot of a tree and left them there. But an old hermit named Helyas found them and took them to his cell; and a hind came out of the wood and suckled the babes, and they grew fair and strong, and the hermit called the eldest by his own name, Helyas.

When King Oriant returned from the wars his mother told him what had happened, and how his wife had betrayed him shamefully, and prayed that she might be put to death. But because of Oriant's love for Beatrix he would not consent, but shut her up in prison instead.

And it came to pass after many years that the king (or a huntsman, versions vary) went to hunt in the forest, and there he saw seven fair children playing together, and each ware a silver chain round the neck; and when the king returned to the palace, he told what he had seen, and the old queen knew that these were in truth Beatrix's

children, and that the knight had betrayed her. So she put out his eyes, and sent another of her servants, and bade him slay the children and bring her the chains as tokens.

The servant went, and found the children, but there were but six, for Helyas had gone into the town to buy food with the old hermit. And when he saw how fair they were, he thought he would but take the chains off their necks; but when he did so, lo, the six were changed into swans and rose into the air and flew away. Then the servant, marvelling much, came to the queen and gave her the chains, and said how he had lost one on the way; and Matabrune gave them to the palace goldsmith and bade him work them up into a cup. But when the goldsmith would melt the silver for the cup, the first chain multiplied so exceedingly that there was silver enough and to spare, so he wrought the cup from the one chain, and kept the rest for himself.

Matabrune was very wroth that Beatrix still lived, and that her son could not seek another wife, so she brought false testimony against her; and the king sware that, unless a champion could be found to prove her innocence, she should die by fire.

Then Beatrix prayed to heaven; and an angel was sent to the hermit's cell to reveal to Helyas his true parentage and his mother's peril. Then Helyas went to Lillefort, and declared unto the

king, his father, who he was, and undertook the single combat for his mother, and overthrew her accuser. Then the servant who had taken the chains declared the truth, and the king bade the goldsmith be called, and he told them how he had wrought but one chain into a cup, and gave the other five into the hands of Helyas. They heard the sound of wings, and six swans alighted on the water by the castle; and Helyas cast the chains round their necks, and they took their human form again, save one only, whose chain had been made into a cup, and he remained a swan. So the king knew how his mother had deceived him, and he condemned her to the fate prepared for Beatrix, and prayed his wife to forgive him.

Now one day, as Helyas stood at the window of the palace, he saw the swan appear, drawing a boat, and he knew that this was a sign from Heaven, and that he must needs go with the swan. Then he armed himself, and his father gave him a golden horn, the blast of which could be heard at Lillefort, and he stepped into the boat and sailed from thence.

The Emperor Otto was holding court at Nimwegen, and before him there appeared the Count of Blankenbourg, who accused his sister-in-law, the Duchess of Bouillon, of having poisoned her husband, and claimed the Duchy for himself as his brother's heir. The Duchess denied the truth of the Count's word, and the Emperor decreed that

the cause should be tried by battle, and bade the Duchess seek a champion. Then they heard the sound of a horn, and on the river appeared a boat drawn by a swan, and within it stood a knight in full armour. Whilst all marvelled the boat drew to shore, and the knight landed and greeted the Emperor courteously, and said he had come thither in search of adventures.

Then the Emperor declared to Helyas the peril in which the Duchess stood, and, since she sware she was innocent, Helyas undertook to be her champion; and he overthrew the Count and slew him, and wedded the daughter of the Duchess, and became lord of Bouillon; and his wife bare him a daughter Ydain (or Ida), and she was mother of Godfrey de Bouillon, Baldwin de Sebourg, and Eustace de Boulogne. But after seven years the young Duchess could no longer hold her peace, but demanded of her lord his name and race. Then Helyas bid her repair to Nimwegen, and there, having commended his wife and daughter to the care of the Emperor, he stepped into the swan-boat and was seen no more.

(The poem given at full length by Reiffenberg relates how Helyas returns to Lillefort, disenchants the swan, and becomes a monk; how he is eventually discovered by vassals from Bouillon, is visited by his wife, and dies in her arms; but all this last part is, of course, a later addition.)

Lohengrin

The Duke of Brabant and Limbourg, having no son, on his death-bed left his lands to his daughter Elsa, and bade one of his warriors, Frederic de Telramund, act as guardian to the princess. Now Frederic, who was a valiant warrior, and had slain a mighty dragon at Stockholm, thought to wed the princess and himself rule over the land; and when she would not hearken to him, he accused her before the emperor of having promised him marriage, and of being forsworn. Then the princess Elsa was in sore grief and trouble, and herself appealed to the Emperor Henry, and he said that the matter must be settled by trial of battle.

One day a falcon that had overflown itself fell into the princess's hands, and to one leg was fastened a golden bell, and Elsa loosened this bell and kept it by her. And in her trouble, as she prayed to God, it chanced that she rang this bell, and the sound grew ever louder and louder till it rang like thunder in the far-off halls of Monsalväsch, where King Arthur and his knights guarded the Grail. And the bell gave them no peace, night or day, till the daughter of Parzival went before the Grail, and asked what they must do to still the bell; and the Grail revealed to her how the Duchess of Brabant was in peril, and that Lohengrin, Parzival's son, must go forthwith

to her aid. Then Lohengrin armed himself, but even as he was about to mount his charger a boat drawn by a swan appeared on the river, and Lohengrin knew that it was the will of Heaven that he should go with the swan; nor would he take any provision for his journey, since he deemed that God would surely provide for him. Then he entered the boat, and the river bare them to the sea, and for five days they sailed; and Lohengrin had naught to eat, though on the fifth day the swan caught for itself a fish. Then the knight reproached the swan that it fed him not, and the swan drew from out of the water a Host (*obelâtelîn*), of which the knight ate and was refreshed; and he gave half to the swan, and it ate thereof and sang so sweetly that Lohengrin deemed it was an angel from Heaven.

So they came to Antwerp; and the Duchess Elsa looked from her palace and saw the boat drawn by the swan, and Lohengrin lying therein asleep on his shield, and she knew that God had sent her a champion. Then she went swiftly to the brink of the river, and when the swan saw her it drew the boat to shore, and Lohengrin landed, and was received with great honour. But a holy abbot looked on the swan and saw that it was in truth an angel that had led the knight thither.

Then Elsa with all her friends and kinsfolk set forth in great state for Mainz, where the Emperor

was holding his court, and there the combat was fought, and Telramund was defeated and condemned to death; and Elsa married Lohengrin, but first she must needs promise to ask him no word of his race or country. So the two were married and lived in peace for many years, and Lohengrin aided the Emperor in his wars against the Huns and other heathen folk. (The greater part of the poem is taken up with the account of these expeditions. On one occasion, when Rome is besieged by the Saracens, SS. Peter and Paul appear clad in armour on either side of Lohengrin.)

And after the Emperor had smitten the heathen at Rome a great feast was held at Cologne, and there, in jousting, Lohengrin overthrew the Duke of Cleves and brake his right arm. Then the Duchess, his wife, was very wrathful, and spake scornfully of Lohengrin, that he might be a Christian and a good knight, but 'twas pity he was not of noble birth, and none knew from whence he came. And the Duchess Elsa took this much to heart, and at night she wept bitterly; and Lohengrin asked what ailed her, and she said how the Duchess of Cleves had spoken ill words that had grieved her sorely. Then Lohengrin knew well what had been said, and he comforted his wife and bade her think no more of it; and so he did twice, but the third night Elsa could no longer keep silence, and asked him of his race and land.

Then Lohengrin prayed the Emperor and all his court to come with him to Antwerp, and there in the presence of all he told them how he was son to Parzival, and how, since his father had failed to ask the question at the Grail Castle, no question might be asked of any of the Grail knights. Then he commended his wife and two sons to the care of the Emperor, and as the boat drew near, drawn by the swan, he stepped into it, and was seen no more.

This poem, which is closely connected with the *Wartburg-krieg*, and not improbably by the same author, is strongly coloured by the influence of the *Parzival*, with which there are numerous cases of verbal agreement, though the style of the two is utterly different. The writer adheres strictly to Wolfram's account of Lohengrin's parentage and descent; his brother Kardeiss is mentioned; and even as Parzival has two sons, so has Lohengrin, instead of the only daughter who appears in the first version of the Swan-knight story.

In studying the above brief account of the legend one point becomes clearly apparent, *i.e.* the comparatively limited area over which the Swan-knight's appearances extend. With the exception of Antwerp the places mentioned are all on the Rhine, and, as a rule, on the lower part

of that river; Cologne may be taken as the extreme limit in the other direction. The introduction of Mainz is doubtless due to the German versions—it is the seat of the Emperor's court; but the hero does not *arrive* there, though the conflict is occasionally fought there. Nimwegen seems to be the original scene of action, though the swan also appears at Cleves, and the name of Valenciennes (*val du cygne*) is supposed to be derived from the legend.

The effect of this consensus of testimony has been to lead scholars to the decision that the legend is of Netherland, or rather of Belgian, origin. The causes which led to its rise and development in this special locality will be treated of in the following chapter.

Lohengrin

THE DRAMA

CHAPTER X

Lohengrin

ARGUMENT

King Henry I. of Germany, desirous of raising an army against the Huns who threaten his kingdom, comes to Brabant to ask for aid, but finds the country distracted by internal dissensions.

The Duke of Brabant on his death-bed had committed the care of his children, Elsa and Gottfried, to Frederic, Count of Telramund. The Count has wooed Elsa for his wife, and on her rejection of his suit has married Ortrud, the descendant of the old race of rulers. Gottfried has mysteriously disappeared, and Telramund, at the instigation of his wife, who professes to have been an unseen witness of the deed, accuses Elsa of the murder of her brother, and of a secret and guilty liaison with an unworthy lover. In his own right, and in that of his wife, he claims the heritage of Brabant for himself.

The king summons Elsa to his presence, and inquires as to the truth of the accusation, but can win no decided answer from the maiden, who is apparently lost in a trance, and can only relate her dream-vision of a knight in armour who came to her aid. Telramund demands trial by battle, and the king orders the lists to be prepared and a champion summoned. None of the knights present will espouse Elsa's cause, and she on her part asserts she will have no defender save the knight of her dreams. While all wait in suspense a boat is seen on the river, drawn by a swan; within it stands a knight in full armour. Landing, he offers himself as Elsa's champion and husband, if she be willing to intrust her cause to him, and will solemnly promise to ask no question as to his name or country. Elsa gladly promises: the two knights fight, and Telramund is vanquished, but the victor spares his life; and Elsa and her knight are borne in triumph from the field.

Telramund is overcome with despair and grief at the loss of his honour, but his wife, Ortrud, assures him that the stranger has only overcome him by the aid of magic, and that could he be induced to reveal his name, or were he to lose so much as a finger-tip, in either case his power would be at an end. The two plot together to attain this result, Ortrud agreeing to instil doubt into the mind of Elsa, and thus induce her to ask the forbidden question; and Telramund, to arrange with the nobles for an attack upon the knight himself.

Elsa appears on the balcony, and Ortrud, arousing her compassion, prevails on her to give her shelter for the night, thus finding an opportunity of carrying out her schemes.

The following morning, when the procession of the bride would enter the minster, Ortrud confronts Elsa on the steps, and openly dares her to ask her champion's name and origin, asserting that he has dishonourable reasons for demanding silence. The king, with the procession of the bridegroom, appears at this moment, and Ortrud is baffled; but as the king, leading bride and bridegroom, ascends the steps of the minster, Telramund appears on the threshold and openly accuses the stranger knight of sorcery, and challenges him to reveal his name. The hero appeals to the king and people who have seen his 'good deed,' and they express themselves as fully convinced of his honour; but Elsa, worked upon by Ortrud's insinuations, at first hesitates; finally she refuses to ask the question, avowing that her love shall triumph over doubt, and the wedding-party enters the minster.

After the banquet, bride and bridegroom are conducted in solemn procession to the marriage-chamber, and left for the first time alone. Elsa at first yields to the joy of the moment, but gradually the doubt which she has stifled finds voice, and she tries to cajole her husband into revealing his name. He evades her hints, and little by little the unhappy wife works herself up into a state of hysterical agony in which she imagines she sees the approach of the swan, and finally frantically demands her husband's name and country. At this moment Telramund and his fellow-conspirators break into the chamber, the stranger knight seizes his sword and slays Telramund on the spot, as Elsa falls fainting to the ground. The men of Brabant, who under their new lord are about to join the army of King Henry and march against the Huns, assemble on the banks of the river. When the king appears, and takes his

seat, (as in the First Act,) the dead body of Telramund is borne before him, and the stranger knight declares the reason of his death; and then proclaiming how Elsa has broken her promise, and asked the forbidden question, proceeds to reveal his name and origin. Far off in a distant land is the castle of Montsalvat where the Holy Grail is guarded by its knights. Parzival is the king of that land; and he is Lohengrin, Parzival's son, and knight of the Grail. From the Grail he came to the aid of Elsa, to the Grail he must now return. The boat drawn by the swan appears again, and, in spite of Elsa's tears and the entreaties of the people, Lohengrin announces that he must depart with the Grail messenger. Ortrud declares that the swan is none other than Gottfried, Elsa's brother, whom she has herself enchanted. At Lohengrin's prayer a dove is sent from Heaven, and, the knight removing the chain from the neck of the swan, it regains the human form. Lohengrin disappears in the boat, drawn by the dove, and Elsa falls dead as her husband passes from her sight.

The drama—Henry I. of Germany—His work—Accusation brought against heroine—Originally directed against the mother—Proof of mythical origin of the story—Character of the heroine—Wolfram's version—Arrival of the Swan-knight—The forbidden question—The conflict—Telramund and Ortrud—The suggestion of magic—*Der jüngere Titurel*—The hero's departure—His real origin—The Swan—Hönir—The Färöe Islands ballad—Bloete's suggestion—The swan as a migratory bird—Celtic parallels—The swan as a transformed being—The significance of the chains—The three tokens—Concluding remarks.

When, after discussing the great dramas of the *Ring* and *Parzival*, both illustrative of the master's later work, we turn to *Lohengrin*, we find ourselves at once on more familiar ground; the hero, mythical in origin, has been from the first brought into contact with real historical person-

ages, and his story, interwoven with theirs, has gained in *vraisemblance* from the connection. The period in which the action passes is so remote that the introduction of a mythical element does not jar upon us, while the fact that there is truth in the setting of the graceful and touching legend makes us lend a willing ear to the voice of the charmer, and allow ourselves to be beguiled into believing that it is all true, and that somewhere, sometime, Elsa and Lohengrin really lived and loved and were parted for ever.

To some minds the *Ring* and *Parsifal* will always remain sealed books—there are who, 'having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not'; but in the case of the *Lohengrin* drama, where the philosophical element is absent, and the mythical subordinated to the human, they must be blind and deaf indeed who cannot recognise Wagner's wealth of melody, his power of dramatic construction, and deep insight into the human heart.

In the setting of his drama Wagner has adhered closely to the indications of his source, the poem of the Bavarian writer; the scene is laid, not at Nimwegen, but at Antwerp, where also Wolfram von Eschenbach places the advent of the Swan-knight; the heroine is Duchess of Brabant, as in both versions; and the monarch, in whose presence the combat takes place, is not the Emperor Otto, but Henry I. surnamed the Fowler, King of Germany.

King from 918 A.D. to 936, Henry not only fostered the warlike instincts of his people, proving himself a successful general at home and abroad, but also gave an impulse to the development of their civic life. The cities, which were in his time little more than a collection of huts, he fortified and surrounded with walls and moats; and by insisting on the residence of certain of the nobility and freedmen within these walls, and that the cities should be the scene of all meetings for the discussion of public affairs, he sowed the seed of that vigorous burgher life which, with its accompanying commercial prosperity, was so marked a feature of mediæval Germany. Henry well deserves to be honourably remembered by his fellow-countrymen, and there are historical as well as artistic reasons for rejoicing at the alteration made at the Bayreuth Festival of 1894, when the drama was at last restored to its proper historical period.

We may therefore note three points in the setting of the drama, as being not merely parts of a picturesquely dramatic *mise en scène*, but as being in themselves historical: Henry himself; his wars with the Huns; and the fact that he brought order and good government into a land distracted by anarchy. This is the substantially true background against which the story unrolls itself.

The nature of the peril which threatens the princess shows a clever combination, on the part of the dramatist, of the various 'motifs' of the different versions, and testifies to Wagner's general familiarity with the literature of the cycle. Thus the accusation of having murdered her brother, and entered into a disgraceful *liaison*, is a reminiscence of the *Chevalier au Cygne*; Frederic's claim to her land, as nearest of kin to the late Duke, is found both in the *Chevalier au Cygne* and Konrad von Würzburg's *Schwanen-ritter* (where no accusation is brought against the lady); the fact that Elsa has rejected Telramund's wooing only appears in the Lohengrin poem;—with admirable skill these various threads are, in the drama, combined in one.

Here we should note that in the earliest versions of the story it is a *mother and daughter* who are in peril; the danger of death menaces the mother alone, and it is in gratitude for her deliverance that she bestows her daughter's hand upon her saviour. This feature has been referred by scholars to the originally mythical signification of the legend. As we have seen in discussing the *Ring*, all early mythologies deal largely in allegorical representations of the eternal, ever-recurring struggle between light and darkness, between the Sun- or Spring-god, ever young and beautiful, and his grim and relentless foe, Winter

—a struggle in which the balance of victory leans now to one side, now to the other; where Spring is ever the conqueror and the conquered. And the object of the struggle is the release of Mother Earth from the grip of her cruel foe who keeps her fast bound with his icy chain. But when Earth is freed, and, responding to the smile of her Deliverer, breaks forth into the buds and blossoms of spring, she is again the Sun-god's maiden bride —it is Freyr and Gerda in another form.

At first the daughter, the wife of the Swan-knight, was a mere lay figure; she shows no characteristic traits, and we know nothing of her save the fact that she wedded the mystic champion, and asked the forbidden question. The story is at first curiously lacking in real human interest; it has hardly cast aside its mythical and symbolical form, and become one with the life of men.

Wolfram von Eschenbach seems to have been the first to assign a real character and individuality to the maiden of the story—a fact which will surprise no one familiar with the works of this poet. In Wolfram's brief, but pregnant, statement we find some decided variations from the accepted form of the story; not only is there no mother, but, an extraordinary fact, there is no wrong done, no accusation brought, no champion demanded, no single combat. Wolfram's maiden is a saint, a would-be nun, who for love of God has forsaken earthly

love, and will give her hand to no man. Urgently entreated by her nobles, who are not unnaturally desirous of a stronger hand at the helm, she consents to marry him whom God shall send her, and leaves the choice to Heaven. When the Swan-knight appears at Antwerp, and offers himself as her husband, she at once concludes that her prayer has been heard and answered, accepts him gladly, and readily assents to his conditions that she shall ask no question as to his name and country. Wolfram here makes the knight distinctly state that if he becomes king of her land he will lose as much as he gains by so doing; a trait we find nowhere else, but which Wagner has preserved in his Third Act.

This indication of Elsa's character as one of unworldly purity and gentleness has been preserved by the author of the *Lohengrin* (to whom we owe the name of the heroine, as we do that of the hero to Wolfram), though his lengthy poem really impresses one less than do the terse and pithy lines of the *Parzival*, and it is obvious that it is really to Wolfram that Wagner was indebted for the sketch which he has developed into so finished a picture.

But though the short account of the *Parzival* furnished the key to the heroine's character, dramatic considerations demanded that Wagner should revert to the original form of the story, and restore the combat, which, having its root in

the mythical interpretation of natural phenomena, must of necessity always have formed part of the legend. Elsa's mystical reliance on the appearance of the Heaven-sent champion becomes much more touching and significant when it is her life, and not merely her kingdom, that is at stake. The situation is in itself intensely dramatic, and there is small wonder that, in the hands of such a master of stage effect as Wagner, the scene of the Swan-knight's arrival became one of the most effective ever placed upon the stage.

In none of the versions is the effect produced equally impressive, for in none is the danger so imminent; true, the duchess is in peril of death, and must needs find a champion, but she has time before her, and the conflict never takes place, as in the drama, immediately on the arrival of the hero.

In the details of the knight's appearance Wagner has followed the *Chevalier au Cygne*, which represents Helyas as standing upright in the boat, rather than the *Lohengrin*, where the hero is slumbering on his shield. Analogy with the Skeâf legend would seem to indicate that the latter was the original manner of the hero's appearance, but dramatically the advent of the knight ready for the conflict which immediately awaits him is, of course, preferable.

In most versions the knight's warning to address to him no question as to his name or

origin precedes, as here, the combat; but both *Lohengrin* and the *Schwanen-ritter* place the prohibition *after* the conflict, and immediately previous to his marriage with the maiden, thus making it the condition of the marriage, not of the championship; and this probably we must hold to be its real force. The connection is with the *nature* of the knight, rather than with his *office*, and the parallels extend far beyond the radius of the Swan-knight tale.

Were there no other proofs forthcoming of the originally divine nature of the hero of this legend, the existence of this feature of the forbidden question would alone go far towards establishing the fact of such divinity. The question is not merely a test of a woman's faith, the form of which might be shifted at will (to Fatima and the key, if needs be), but an essential necessity of the situation. The natural and the supernatural cannot meet on equal grounds; the sole condition of their subsistence together as *equals* is that the supernatural be, for the time being, ignored, laid aside, and treated as non-existent. Once admit, by the question, that it is present, and you must abide the inevitable consequences. In all traditions the essential condition of a union between two beings, one natural, one supernatural, is that the human partner shall ask no question as to the origin of the other; in the act of questioning lies

not only the admission of inequality, but the intrusion behind the veil which no mere mortal may pass uninvited. To ask the *name* seems but a small thing, but the name is the *thing* itself; to reveal the name is to reveal the being—even if the fate be not that of Semele, what is known cannot be *un*known; the possibility of an equal union is for ever destroyed.

In no version of the legend does the maiden ever hesitate as to her power of fulfilling the conditions—a natural touch, as she has as yet no idea of the close and intimate union involved in marriage, which will render the strain of enforced silence on one point greater as time goes on. It is significant that all the versions, without exception, make the wife keep silence for years,[1] and break down suddenly at last.

In the details of the conflict we meet with a clear proof of Wagner's familiarity with his source, a proof which, with two exceptions noted in the *Ring*, is somewhat unusual in his works; the Herald's proclamation to all lookers-on to observe strict neutrality,—

> 'Denn wer nicht wahrt des Friedens Recht,
> Der Freie büss' es mit der Hand,
> Mit seinem Haupt büss' es der Knecht,'—

[1] And we may note that this is almost invariably the case in parallel stories, where it is, as a rule, the mortal husband who transgresses the conditions laid upon him by a wife of supernatural origin.

is drawn directly from the poem, where the words are—

> 'alsô wart der vride ah umbe gekündet unde geschrîet
> unde verboten bî der hant
> dem ritter, sô wær dâ dem kneht daz houbet pfant.'[1]

We may note that, in the legend, the appearance of the Swan-knight does not seem to have struck terror to the heart of the accuser, as in the drama; the victory is none too easily won—it is a hard fight, as indeed from mythical analogy it should be; as a rule the adversary of the hero meets his death in the combat, with the exception of the *Lohengrin*, where Telramund falls by the axe of the executioner.

The great innovation which Wagner has made in the legend consists in the importance given to the characters of Telramund and Ortrud. The former, as the false accuser, is of course an integral part of the legend, but nowhere is stress laid on his character—he is practically a lay figure, created for the purpose of enabling the Swan-knight to display his valour, and, as such, makes no impression on the mind; but, as we have remarked before, the *dramatis personæ* of the story are altogether lacking in the distinctive characterisation which is a marked feature of the Siegfried and Perceval legends.

The *Lohengrin* poem, which dwells on the

[1] *Lohengrin*, edited by Prof. Rückert. vv. 2197 *et seq.*

valour of Telramund, and ascribes his fall to his overweening ambition, is the first attempt at individualising the character. Wagner has worked on the same lines, only, of course, with far more elaboration and insight, and represents Telramund as by no means a repellent character, practically shifting the *rôle* of villain from him to Ortrud.

This character Wagner may fairly be said to have created, and that with even more than his usual success; it is Ortrud, and the opposition to Lohengrin which is of the essence of her character, who really makes the drama; it is she, and not Telramund, who is really engaged in the hand-to-hand struggle with the mystic champion.

The first germ of the character is of course found in the Duchess of Cleves, who in *Lohengrin* is the cause of Elsa's asking the fatal question, being influenced in her action by a desire to avenge her husband. But Wagner has given the incident a much deeper meaning than attaches to it in the poem, and one that has necessarily affected the development of the character of the actors. There seems no reason to suppose from the legend that the wife ever doubted her husband's truth and honour; there is no suggestion of magic; the question seems to have been entirely due to feminine curiosity, pure and simple, which could no

longer be suppressed—coupled in the *Lohengrin* with the very natural desire of confuting a malicious woman. Of the doubt which poisons the mind of the heroine, and which, from the circumstances of Lohengrin's appearance in direct and literal answer to her prayer, is distinctly a sin, there is in the legend no trace. The whole character of the story has been deepened by this change of 'motif,' and the direct connection with Ortrud, in whose character is retained the original mythical significance attaching to the enemy of the Swan-knight.

Ortrud is not merely a bold, unscrupulous woman, devoured by ambition, and, as Wagner himself says, 'incapable of love,' but she is the representative of the expiring power of Paganism, confronted with the Christianity in which it recognises its predestined conqueror, and, writhing like a wounded dragon in its death-agony, is bent on inflicting injury. '*It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise its heel.*' Heathen and Christian myth are again brought into sharp conflict, as in the Second Act of *Parsifal*; but Ortrud, as a far less complex character than Kundry, is more operative for evil. The struggle does not end as there with the ideal victory, that which converts a foe into a friend, but rather is a drawn battle; if Ortrud dies on the field, she has first practically driven her foe off it. It is the comparative sim-

plicity of her character and the directness of her aims that give Ortrud her power over Telramund and Elsa, both infinitely superior in character, but more complex and less certain of themselves.

With the introduction of Ortrud as representative of the powers of darkness, the suggestion of magic, the invariable explanation to the mind of the wicked of the manifestations of the spiritual world, is naturally coupled. Although, as we remarked above, there is no suggestion of magic in the legend itself, yet the idea, introduced in an addition to the story, is not altogether foreign to it. In *Der jüngere Titurel*, already referred to, we are told that after Lohengrin left Brabant he came to the country of Lizaborye, where he wedded the princess Belaye, who, far from running any risk of losing her husband by asking the forbidden question, was so devoted to him that she could not bear the slightest separation. Apart from Lohengrin she fell into a species of trance, and remained motionless and voiceless till his return. Suspecting the princess to be under the influence of a charm, one of her waiting-women advised her to cut off and eat a morsel of her husband's flesh, assuring her that if she did so he would be unable to leave her. Belaye refused indignantly, saying she would rather be buried alive than injure a finger of her beloved lord, and from that time withdrew her favour from the treacherous

adviser. The waiting-woman, desirous of revenge, went to the parents of the princess, and persuaded them to follow her advice, in order to release their daughter from the spell which bound her. Lohengrin, who had fallen asleep, fatigued, on his return from hunting, woke to find himself surrounded by armed men; he drew his sword and attacked them fiercely, slaying more than a hundred, but was overcome by numbers and fatally wounded. The unhappy wife expired on learning the tidings of her husband's death, and, according to the poet, their embalmed corpses were, even in his day, shown to pilgrims! The name of the country was changed from Lizaborye to Lothringen (Lorraine) in remembrance of Lohengrin.[1]

Here we find the origin of the advice given by Ortrud to Telramund in the Second Act, and by him communicated to Elsa (viz. that if Lohengrin be indeed a magician the loss even of a finger-tip will deprive him of his power), as also of the incursion of Telramund and his followers into the marriage-chamber, which brings about the death of the count.

The introduction of the magic 'motif' into the story proper, leading as it does to the effective scene of Telramund's accusation, is distinctly a dramatic gain, even regarded superficially; when we look below the surface we see that some such change

[1] Cf. Reiffenberg, *Chevalier au Cygne*, Introduction, p. lx.

was imperatively necessary. A plausible reason had to be found for Elsa's speedy transgression of the conditions imposed by her deliverer. As we have said before, in the *legend* it is apparently the strain of time which breaks down, not the wife's faith, but her resolution; in the drama there is no time to test the enduring power of the heroine's resolution—it is the faith which lies at the root of the resolution which must itself fail. The unworldly and mystical character ascribed to the maiden by Wolfram von Eschenbach lent itself admirably to the influence of the 'motif' suggested by Albert von Scharffenburg; such a maiden, fully prepared to accept the truth of the operation of spiritual forces in the material world, would be a fit victim to the subtle instilling of doubt as to the real nature of those forces.

This change made by Wagner in accordance with dramatic exigencies heightens immensely the tragic pathos of the story, with its sudden changes from sorrow to joy, and from joy to sorrow. Dramatically, the beautiful scene in the marriage-chamber is all Wagner's own; though he has taken a hint from Wolfram in making Lohengrin reveal, as a final claim on his wife's forbearance, that he has already lost much for her sake; and has followed the indications of *Der jüngere Titurel* in the dramatic

close of the scene and the death of Telramund, which thus eventually comes about, as it certainly should do, by the direct action of the hero.

The scene of the Swan-knight's farewell forms an important feature in every version of the legend; it is no simple matter of a parting between husband and wife, with which the outside world has nothing to do, but an imposing ceremony. As public as was the advent of the hero must be his departure; and, however far from the court of the monarch the question be asked, it is in his presence, in the sight of those who witnessed the knight's arrival, and heard his prohibition, that the results of transgressing that prohibition shall become manifest. We cannot say that the question publicly forbidden shall be publicly answered, for answered it is not, save in the *Parzival* and the *Lohengrin*; elsewhere the hero departs leaving his wife still ignorant of that which she has paid so dearly to know.

Professor Golther, in an article on *Lohengrin* contributed to the *Bayreuther Kalender* for 1894, suggests that it was the connection with the Grail which here introduced a change into the story by enabling the hero to reveal his true name and origin without any loss of dignity. This may be so, as the Grail knight Lohengrin has, of course, lost his original *divine* nature, but he is still above and apart from ordinary humanity, though

not out of touch with it—he has gained in power of expression what he has lost in exaltation.

We certainly owe a debt of gratitude to the unknown writer who first connected the Swan-knight legend with the Grail myth, if he rendered possible the grand 'Grals-Erzählung.' Here Wagner has followed closely the lines of the poem, where Lohengrin makes a similar but even fuller statement; based entirely, so far as concerns his parentage and descent, on the *Parzival* of von Eschenbach, and recounting the manner of his summons to the aid of Elsa. Wagner's original intention was similar, and the recital as it now stands is only about half the length of the original text; concluding as it does at present, it is undeniably more effective.

And here, our task almost concluded, it will be well to pause, and, gathering together the scattered suggestions already made, ask ourselves definitely who he is, this hero, and whence did he come?

We know that he was not at first the Grail knight; that he was a being of divine, or at least other-worldly, origin may be freely admitted, but there is not an absolute consensus of opinion as to his nature. Thus, most scholars consider that the name originally given to the Swan-knight, Helyas, is in itself significant; but as to the origin

of it, they differ widely. For instance, some, as Reiffenberg, would derive the name from Hel, and hold the knight to be a visitant from the realms of Hel, the abode of the departed; identifying the Grail castle with the castle which, as we have seen in both the preceding studies, *does*, not infrequently, appear as the other world, the home of the dead.

Others hold that the name is derived from the Greek, and indicates the solar origin of the hero; and the form of the task assigned to him certainly suggests that the latter solution is the correct one, and that Helyas, Gerhardt Swan, or Lohengrin, by whatever name he may be called, is in his origin closely akin to Siegfried and Parsifal. And here we come to an important feature in the legend, and one which we have hitherto refrained from touching upon, *i.e.* the Swan, and its original relation to the knight. To determine this we must go back to a very early point in our investigation, and see if no means can be found of in any way bridging the chasm between the Skeáf myth and the legend of the Swan-knight.

Now, as an element in the development of the story, scholars have laid considerable stress on a folk-ballad current in the Faröe Islands, in which it is related how a peasant plays a game of skill with a giant, and, having lost, must forfeit the life of

his son, if he cannot succeed in effectually concealing the child:

'Bauer und Riese spielten lang,
Der Bauer verlor, der Riese gewann.

Gewonnen ist das Spiel mir schon,
Nun will ich haben deinen Sohn.

Haben will ich den Sohn von dir,
So du ihn nicht bergen kannst von mir.'[1]

The peasant appeals in turn to the early Northern Trilogy, Odin, Hönir, and Loke, each of whom try their skill at hiding the child; Hönir summons to him three swans, and, changing the boy into a piece of down, hides him in the neck of one of them. This, apparently the first (or only) recorded instance of a god coming to the aid of a mortal by means of a swan, has, as we have said before, been considered as a valuable link in the development of the story.

What, then, was the swan's connection with Hönir? In the first instance, undoubtedly, it was as a water-bird that the swan was subject to the god, who in this earliest Trilogy represented the element of water; the swan, we learn from the Edda, is the bird of Niördhr, also a water-god, who as one of the Vans was with Freyr exchanged against Hönir and Mimir when peace was sealed between the Vans and the Asas.

[1] Cf. Simrock, *Deutsche Mythologie*, p. 107, where the ballad is given in its entirety.

But Hönir has another character. Bloete, in a most interesting article on the subject in the *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Alterthum*,[1] points out that he is also known in the Faröe Isles as *Aurkonungr*, which by analogy with Old German and Anglo-Saxon he translates as 'König des Fruhlings-glanzes,' *i.e.* Hönir is also a spring- or light-god. The writer then goes on to suggest an exceedingly plausible reason why the swan should in this, even as in his earlier character, be the bird of Hönir.[2] Swans are, as is well known, migratory birds; and in the days when the Lowlands of the Rhine formed a widely spreading marshy delta, this was a favourite resting-place of the birds on their flight to and from their summer quarters in Northern Europe. Thus, with the coming of the swans came and went the genial days of summer; and in the simple minds of the early inhabitants of those Lowlands, who personified the powers of Nature, and looked upon the spring as a beneficent god, what wonder if the swan became his attendant bird, the herald alike of his advent and of his departure? If we

[1] 'Der zweite teil der Schwanrittersage,' *Zeitschrift für Deutsches Alterthum*, vol. xxxviii. part iii.

[2] Some scholars hold that Hönir himself may have been a personification of the swan, or stork, the white water-bird, and translate *aurkonungr* as 'lord of the ooze.' Cf. *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, Introduction, p. cii. The origin of the myth is certainly extremely ancient, and involved in great obscurity.

accept this suggestion, we can easily understand *why* the earliest home of the Swan-knight story was, as we have seen, in those very Lowlands of the Rhine.[1]

Bloete further traces the first growth of the idea to the original Celtic dwellers in these lands, who communicated it to their Batavian successors, the connection of the swan with the light- rather than the water-god being Celtic and not Germanic. When Lug, the principal Celtic light-god, would bring about the birth of the hero Cuchulainn, he sends a flight of mysterious birds, unnamed in the saga, but clearly recognisable as swans. They fly in groups of twenty, each group divided into pairs; the first pair coupled by a silver yoke, the succeeding pairs by silver chains. They sing as they fly, and eat grass and plants, digging them up by the roots. In the night of Conchobar's pursuit of the birds a heavy snow falls.

In another Irish saga, 'The Dream of Angus'—which relates how Angus, the son of the light-god Dagde, wooed and won Caer, the daughter of Ethal Anbual, in Connaught—the hero sees the maiden of his love, for the first time, surrounded by one hundred and fifty maidens, who go in

[1] It is only fair, however, to the advocates of the 'Hel' theory to say that the swan does also appear as the messenger of death. Thus the goddesses who appear in this character to the hero Cuchulainn are seen in the guise of swans coupled with a golden chain.

pairs, each pair linked together by a golden chain; when he finds her again it is as a swan, with one hundred and fifty other swans, wearing gold caps on their heads, the connecting chains being now of silver. Angus becomes a swan, and, wedded to his love, the two sing strains of surpassing sweetness.

It is clearly evident that these swans are identical with the mysterious birds of the preceding legend.[1]

This second story suggests another idea, closely connected with the legend, *i.e.* the transformation of human beings into swans, also an ancient mythological fancy. Thus the Valkyrie appear as swan-maidens, but here the change seems to have been merely external, brought about by the donning of a swan's skin, *Schwan Hemd*, which could be put off at will. Later, the complete transformation of human being into bird seems to

[1] In this connection the following quotation from Professor Hale's *Folia Litteraria*, p. 232, may be of interest: 'Socrates when, in his last moments, as described in the *Phædo*, he remonstrates with his friends for thinking he regarded his coming fate as a calamity, tells them they seem to give him credit for less divination than swans possess, which, though they have sung in their former days, sing most fully and frequently when they rejoice at the prospect of their departure to be with the god whose servants they are; that is, to be with Apollo.' Cicero reproduces these words in the *Tusculan Disputations* (i. 30, 73): 'Ut cygni, qui non sine causa Apollini dicati sint, sed quod ab eo divinationem habere videantur, qua providentes quid in morte boni sit, cum cantu et voluptate moriantur.' This would seem to indicate that the connection of the swan with the light-god is classical as well as Celtic.

have been effected by means of a talisman, the golden or silver chain which figures almost invariably in these swan 'märchen.'[1] We find them not only in the *Chevalier au Cygne*, and in the Celtic tales already quoted, but also in a pathetic Irish folk-tale, *The Fate of the Children of Lir*. The original significance of the chain is not now easy to discover; *i.e.* whether the retention of the chain is the condition of the retention of the human form, or whether, as the Celtic parallels would suggest, and as Wagner seems to have thought, it was the donning of the chain which transformed the wearer into a swan. It may be that, in the first instance, the chain was really an hereditary talisman, the possession of which gave the holder power to change shapes at will, and therefore operated both ways.

It is somewhat significant, in this connection, that in the Volsunga-saga the two were-wolves, whose discarded skins Sigmund and Sinfiotli put on, themselves thereby becoming wolves, wear golden collars round their necks. The Volsunga-saga seems to regard this as a token of royal birth—they are 'kings' sons'; but it seems quite possible that originally the significance was talismanic; and if so, the idea must be extremely

[1] When we do not find a chain, the transformation is effected by a shirt, of marguerites or of nettles. Is this a reminiscence of Brynhild's *Schwan Hemd*?

ancient. M. Gaston Paris considers that the existence of the chain points to the very early connection of the two story-types (*i.e.* the Swan-knight and the Seven Swans), as the chain 'can only be derived from the one with which the swan drew the knight's boat'! But the existence of these early Celtic parallels directly contradicts this, we must say, very tame and uninteresting solution.

The swan in the legend has therefore a double character; in the first instance, it was the attendant of the spring-god, and, as such, connected equally with his arrival and his departure; later, when the originally divine character of the hero of the tale had been, at least in part, forgotten, the presence of the swan required to be otherwise accounted for, and the means lay ready to hand in one of the many 'transformation' tales current in mediæval times. The chain, so far from belonging originally to the Swan-knight myth, has really no connection with that myth in its earliest form, but is a feature introduced from an originally independent group of tales.

Wagner has, in the drama, followed the indications of the *Chansons de geste*, and combined the two stories; his Lohengrin, by his connection with the mystical service of the Grail, retains, as we have seen, in part his divine character, which in the *Chevalier au Cygne* is completely

obscured (one sees no reason why Helyas should *not* reveal his name and country); but the swan is the swan of the *Chansons*, no longer the herald of his divine master, but the enchanted knight of the folk-tale; the identification with the vanished brother of the heroine being a happy invention of the dramatist.

The fact that Lohengrin disenchants the swan by the removal of the chain shows that Wagner had closely studied the legend, and was alive to the importance of this seemingly trifling feature.

We may here repeat, what we have said before, that it is the *Dove*, and not the *Swan*, which is rightly the bird of the Grail. The connection with the latter is solely that of the Lohengrin legend, and it is, naturally enough, the Dove which, when the Swan has regained the human form, guides the hero back to Montsalvat.

The tokens which Lohengrin leaves behind him —the horn, sword, and ring—appear to be features of the specially *Lohengrin* version of the story; in the *Chevalier au Cygne* they do not appear. There the knight possesses a marvellous horn, the gift of his father, but he does not leave it behind him—it is a blast from it which announces his return to Lillefort. The three tokens are mentioned by Wolfram, and in the *Lohengrin* the departing hero gives the horn and sword respectively to his two sons, and the ring, the gift

of his mother, to his wife. The wife in the legend does not die, as does Elsa in the drama, and one is inclined to suspect that the appearance of the *three* tokens in the story is coincident with the attribution to the Swan-knight of two sons, instead of the one daughter of the original legend —they were his parting gifts to his wife and children, and, as such, have more force in the legend than in the drama.

We remarked at the commencement of this study that the Lohengrin, or rather the Swan-knight, legend is, as a legend, far less important than either of those which we have previously discussed. It presents points of distinct interest, but the testimony on these points is far less varied and contradictory than is the case, for instance, in the Siegfried legend. There is little real doubt as to what was the original form of the story; its characteristics would from the first be practically what they are now. In its earliest form there would be the trial by battle; the mystic champion, probably from the first attended by the swan; the defeat of the accuser, and marriage of the hero with the rescued maiden, followed by their separation in consequence of the asking of the forbidden question. For the remaining features the folk-tale of the swans is responsible.

Wagner has throughout adhered closely to the

traditional form of the story, producing his effect rather by natural development of the characters along lines already marked than by introduction of philosophical 'motif' or rearrangement of incident. The result of this comparative simplicity of method is that the *Lohengrin* drama stands in a different relation to the legend at its base than do the dramas of the *Ring* and *Parsifal*, and can fairly challenge comparison with any other version of the legend. The fact that the myth of the Swan-knight is represented in literature by no such work of enduring genius as the Volsunga-saga, the Nibelungen-lied, or the Parzival, operates of course immensely in Wagner's favour; and a study of the various mediæval versions, both in prose and in poetry, of this story, will probably leave us convinced that his *Lohengrin* is not merely a fine drama, but incontestably the *best* version of a once popular and oft-told tale.

Tristan and Isolde

THE LEGEND

CHAPTER XI

Tristan and Isolde

Marked popularity of the Tristan legend—Its origin—Conflicting theories—Development of the legend—Differing character of the versions—Minstrel version—Berol—Eilhart von Oberge—Courtly version—Thomas of Brittany—Gottfried von Strassburg.

When we turn from the contemplation of those dramas, to the study of which the preceding chapters have been devoted, to the examination of the Tristan drama, we find ourselves at once upon different ground. In the dramas of the *Ring* and *Parsifal*, the abstract element, mythic, philosophic, symbolic, largely predominates; in *Lohengrin* the philosophic element is absent, and the mythic and human are closely interwoven; in the *Tristan, par excellence* of all Wagner's dramas, the human element is in the ascendant, the mythic element is, for dramatic purposes, practically non-existent, the philosophic, though largely present, does not dominate the situation. Tristan and Isolde are not philosophical ideas clothed in human form, but intensely real, living, human

beings, whose actions, albeit capable of interpretation in philosophic terms, are not prompted by philosophic or abstract considerations. They may have been, they probably were, at one time mythical beings, but their humanity has long ago swallowed up their divinity; it is through their humanity that they appeal to us, and by virtue of it their story early won a wide-spread acceptance.

If we may judge of the popularity of a hero not merely by the number of MSS. in which his story has descended to us, but also by the differing nationalities in whose literature he is a familiar figure, we shall probably be led to the conclusion that, of all the heroes of mediæval romance, Tristan was the most universally popular. North and south alike know him well; the Scandinavian lands, as well as Spain and Italy, offer us versions of the Tristan saga; while in England, France, and Germany the Tristan literature forms no inconsiderable proportion of the legacy bequeathed to us by the Romance writers of the middle ages. Dr. Sommer, in his edition of the *Morte d'Arthur*, points out that Malory devotes almost one-third of his great work to the life and adventures of Sir Tristram.

How old the story really is, it is almost impossible to discover; that it took its present shape some time in the twelfth century, and has practi-

cally undergone but little alteration since that date is certain; but the literary versions are not only all near in date to each other, but also much of the same stage in development; and the indications of a mythical and prehistoric origin are far less clear than in the case of either Siegfried, Parsifal, or Lohengrin. As we shall see when we come to examine the drama, there are certainly traces of an Aryan origin, but myth has here been completely swallowed up by romance.

Scholars were at one time practically unanimous as to the Celtic origin of the story, and though of late years an attempt has been made to minimise the importance of the Celtic element, and to refer the origin of the story rather to French than to Celtic sources, the attempt cannot be held to have been entirely successful. That the development of the story shows traces of a perplexing combination of elements, Northern, Classic, Oriental, may be admitted; nevertheless, the root of the story remains Celtic, and it is on ground occupied by Celtic races that the action unfolds itself. It may well be, however, as we shall see later, that while preserving the traditional nationality of the legend the locality of its origin may have to be somewhat shifted, and we may find that it did not take its rise, as has been generally supposed, in the south-west of England, but further north.

The literary development of the story appears to have had much in common with that of the Siegfried legend; both were imbedded in a number of songs or *lais*, and, as we have seen in the case of the Nibelungen-lied, these detached songs eventually took form and shape as an epic poem. But the construction of the Tristan is much looser than that of the great German national epic, and, as Wagner in his drama conclusively showed, large parts of the story can be cut away without injury to the unity of the whole.

The real kernel of the story is the fatal love of Tristan for his uncle's wife, a love which Isolde returns, and which eventually issues in the death of both. Round this central theme gathered by degrees a multitude of details, relating principally the growing suspicion of the husband, and the wiles employed by the lovers to evade detection while gratifying their passion. The story was a favourite one, the framework was elastic, and the minstrels were, not unnaturally, willing to gratify the desire of their hearers by the introduction of details borrowed from sources originally foreign to the theme. How many of the detached episodes now forming the legend were part of the original *stoff* it is impossible to determine.

Of the versions that have come down to us the oldest are, as would be expected from what we have said of the growth of the story, poetical, and

are by scholars divided into two branches. The one, fuller in detail and looser in construction, is called by M. Gaston Paris[1] the *French*, by Dr. Golther[2] the *Minstrel*, version, and is mainly represented by French fragments attributed to a certain Berol (of whom nothing definite seems to be known), and the German poem of Eilhart von Oberge; this also lies at the root of the later prose versions of the legend. From these prose versions Malory drew his very much distorted version of the story.

The other branch, according to M. Gaston Paris the *English*, according to Dr. Golther the *Courtly*, version, is represented by the poems of Thomas of Brittany and his follower and adaptor, Gottfried von Strassburg. Gottfried, unfortunately, left his poem unfinished, and his continuators, three in number, present more affinity to the French, or Minstrel, version.

It is difficult to say which of these two branches most accurately represents the original story; probably both have widely departed from it. The Minstrel version, which in parts has retained more archaic features, and is the older of the two, is also the one which has become most contaminated by the introduction of extraneous matter, notably by connection with the Arthurian legend, of which

[1] *Tristan et Iseut.* Paris, 1894.

[2] *Die Sage von Tristan und Isolde.* Munich, 1887.

the Tristan story proper is entirely independent. The English, or Courtly, version, which appears to be the later, is also the simpler, and, from a literary point of view, greatly the superior. Both the unfinished work of Gottfried, and the fragments we possess of his French original, are works of great poetical charm and of real depth of feeling; the author of the latter, Thomas of Brittany, is generally supposed to have been an Anglo-Norman (the Norman Conquest having, in the opinion of more than one scholar, played an important *rôle* in the diffusion of the legend); and considering the value of the work he has left behind him, it is much to be hoped that this supposition is correct, and that M. Paris is justified in designating the most poetical version of the story as the *English* version, and holding the author to have been of English birth.

It is on the German representative of this branch, the poem of Gottfried von Strassburg, that Wagner has based his drama, in so far, that is, as he has followed any of the versions; for, as will be seen, he has treated the story with far more conciseness than any of his predecessors, and with a simplicity and directness of method especially suitable to a legend which can only lose through elaboration, and become distasteful by insistence on detail. An abstract of Gottfried's poem is given, as showing how Wagner

departed from, rather than followed, his ostensible model.

Tristan

There was once a certain prince, by name Riwalîn, surnamed Kanelengres, of Parmenie, who held his land in fief of Morgan, duke of the Britons, and was a valiant warrior. Now this prince had heard much of the fame of King Mark of Cornwall and England, and desired to visit his court; so he delivered his land and his castles into the care of his marshal, Rual le Foitenant, and journeyed into Cornwall, where King Mark received him with great honour.

The king had a fair sister named Blansche-flur, and she and Riwalîn loved one another, but kept their love secret, nor did they confess it to each other till Riwalîn had been sorely wounded in defence of King Mark's land and lay in danger of death. Then tidings were brought to Riwalîn that Morgan had invaded his land, and he must needs return to defend it; and since Blansche-flur feared to remain in Cornwall lest her brother should discover her secret and be wroth with her, she fled by night with Riwalîn, and the two returned to Parmenie, where they were wedded, and Riwalîn left his wife in the care of the Marshal Rual while he marched against his foes. But it so chanced that the battle went against

him; he was slain; and when the news was brought to Blansche-flur, so great was her grief that she died, having borne a son, and was buried with her husband. But Rual took the child, and, since he feared Morgan might do it a harm, he gave out that his wife had borne him a son, and he named the babe Tristan, and all thought it was in truth his child.

Now, when Tristan grew older, Rual gave him into the care of one Kurvenal, and sent him throughout different lands that he might learn their speech, and he had him taught all knightly skill and customs; and he could play all manner of instruments, and sing more sweetly than any man.

When Tristan was fourteen years of age it came to pass that a ship manned by Northmen put into the haven at Kanoel, near to Rual's castle, and the ship was laden with all manner of stuffs, and weapons, and hawks for the chase. Rual went on board to see the merchandise, and with him went his own sons, and Tristan and Kurvenal. Then it chanced so that Tristan saw a chess-board hanging on the wall, and he knew chess, and would play a match with the ship's captain, so Rual and his sons went on shore and bade Tristan and Kurvenal follow when they would.

But the shipmen, seeing how fair a youth Tristan was, and skilled in languages and music, would

fain have kept him with them, so they lifted the anchor secretly and sailed away from the shore before Tristan was ware of it. Then he and Kurvenal were wroth, and the sailors set Kurvenal in a boat, and sent him back to the land to tell Rual what had chanced, but Tristan they took with them. A great storm arose, and for eight days they drifted before the wind, till at last they bethought them that it was in punishment for having stolen the lad, and when the storm abated they set Tristan on shore, and sailed away. Then Tristan, when he found himself alone, made his way over a hill till he came to a road on the other side and met with two pilgrims, who told him that this was the land of Cornwall, and he was near to Tintagel, the castle of King Mark. And soon they fell in with the king's hunters, who had slain a stag, and Tristan showed them how to skin and cut up their game in a courtly manner, and rode back with them to the court of King Mark.

The king wondered much at his skill, and asked the lad who he was, and Tristan said he was son to a merchant of Parmenie, and had journeyed hither with other merchants; and Mark loved the lad for his courtesy and his skill in music, and treated him with great honour, and held him as his dearest friend. Now when Rual le Foitenant learned what had befallen Tristan, he took money

and goods and set forth to search for the lad, and he wandered through Northern lands till his money was gone, and he must needs go on foot and beg his bread. After four years he fell in with the pilgrims whom Tristan had met in Cornwall, and learned from them that the lad had come to his mother's folk. Then Rual set sail for Cornwall, and came to Tintagel, and Tristan rejoiced greatly at their meeting, but he sorrowed when he learned the truth, and knew that he was not Rual's son. But King Mark held it for good tidings when he knew that Tristan was his nephew, and he spake that he would take no wife, but hold Tristan as his son and heir; and he knighted the lad, and with him thirty companions.

Then Tristan set sail with Rual for his own land, where his folk welcomed him gladly; and he armed himself and his men, and rode against Morgan, and slew him, and so avenged his father's death. Then he gave over his kingdom to Rual and his sons for their heritage, and sailed back to Cornwall to his uncle King Mark.

Now when Tristan returned to Cornwall he found the kingdom in great sorrow on account of the coming of Morold, a valiant warrior, brother-in-law to King Gurmun of Ireland, who had come to claim the tribute of thirty noble youths, due to Gurmun, who had conquered the

land, and laid it under tribute while King Mark was yet young. Morold was so valiant a warrior that no one durst face him in single combat; but Tristan chid them all for cowards, and said he himself would fight with Morold.

They appointed the fight for the third day on an island near at hand; and when Tristan came there he set his boat adrift, and told Morold that since one of them must needs die, one boat would suffice for the return. Then the two heroes fought, and Morold wounded Tristan in the thigh, and told him the hurt should be his death, since the sword was poisoned, and none but his sister, Queen Isolt of Ireland, could heal the wound. But Tristan smote Morold so fiercely that he struck off his right hand, and then his head, and so left him dead on the island, but a piece of Tristan's sword still remained in the head of the dead knight. And the men of Ireland took up the body, and sailed home with it; and King Gurmun was very wroth, and swore that any Cornish man who landed in Ireland should be put to death.

Now no healing might be found for Tristan's wound; and he remembered him of Morold's words, and told his uncle King Mark that he must sail for Ireland, and seek healing at the hands of Queen Isolt. So he set forth with Kurvenal and eight others, and when they drew

near to Ireland he bade them clothe him in a mean garment, and set him in a boat with his harp, and leave him; and thus they did. Then Tristan lay in the boat, and harped so sweetly that the men of Develîn drew near to see who the minstrel might be, and Tristan told them how he was one Tantris, a musician, and had been wounded in a fight with sea-robbers. So they bore him on shore, and news came to the queen of the strange minstrel, and his skill in music and languages, and she said she would heal him, and bade him in return teach her daughter Isolt his cunning in music and song. And Tantris did this; and when his wound was healed he told the queen how he had left his wife at home, and feared lest she be given to another, and the queen gave him his leave, and he sailed back to Cornwall.

Now when Tristan came back to Tintagel, King Mark was exceeding glad; but the nobles were jealous, and said Tristan must be a sorcerer, else he could never have returned in safety, and they prayed the king to marry, since they thought it ill that Tristan should be the heir. Then Tristan spake much to his uncle of the beauty of the Princess Isolt, and offered to sail back to Ireland, and woo her for King Mark's bride, so that peace should be sealed betwixt the two lands. The king was willing, but Tristan said that twenty of the nobles

who were his foes should go with him, and so Mark bade them do.

So they set sail again for Ireland; and when they drew near the haven of Weisefort, Tristan bade his companions abide in the ship, while he landed and saw how matters would go.

Now at that time there was a great dragon which did much harm in the land, and King Gurmun had sworn that to whomsoever should kill the dragon he would give his daughter Isolt for wife. Then Tristan set forth to seek the dragon, and when he came near to the lair of the monster he saw three knights who were flying for terror before it. But Tristan pursued the dragon, and slew it, and cut out its tongue. Then, because he was wearied with the fight, he lay down in a pool to cool himself, and the venom of the beast overcame him, and he became unconscious. Now one of the knights who had fled was the king's steward, who loved the Princess Isolt, but was too great a coward himself to face the dragon; but from afar he heard the death-cry of the monster, and he came back secretly, and followed the track, and found the dragon dead, but could see no sign of the slayer. Then he cut off the dragon's head, and carried it back to court, and said he had slain the monster, and claimed the hand of the princess. Isolt loved him not, and was in great grief at the thought of wedding

him; but her mother by her magic skill found out that it was in truth another who had slain the dragon; and she bade her daughter and her kinswoman Brangæne come with her, and they went forth at dawn, and found the knight insensible, and knew him for the minstrel, Tantris, and brought him back in secret to the palace. Then when the steward claimed the fulfilment of the king's promise the queen said that another had in truth slain the dragon, and that at a fitting time she would bring forth the knight, and the matter should be settled in single combat.

Now one day the Princess Isolt bade them make ready the armour of Tantris, and when she looked on the sword, and saw how a piece was lacking, it came to her mind that the piece of steel that was in the head of her uncle Morold, which her mother had kept with care, would fit the spot, and she brought the splinter, and found that it indeed fitted the sword; and she bethought her further that the name *Tantris* was but *Tristan* writ backwards, and she knew this was her uncle's slayer. Then she took the sword in her hand and would have slain Tristan; but her mother, Queen Isolt, stayed her hand, and said since she had sworn the knight safety she must keep her word, and Brangæne held with her, and said it must needs be a great matter that had brought Tristan to Ireland again, and it would be well to hear where-

fore he had come. Then Tristan told them how his uncle had sent him to ask for the hand of the Princess Isolt, and the queen thought it well, since Mark was a great king; and she spake to her husband, and he was also willing, since Morold had been brother to the queen, and if she thought well to forgive his slayer he had naught against it. So peace was made betwixt Cornwall and Ireland, and King Gurmun set free the lads whom he held as tribute from King Mark. Then when the day came that the steward should claim the fulfilment of the king's promise, and showed the dragon's head in proof that he had slain it, Tristan came at the queen's word, and showed how he held the tongue, and they knew the steward had spoken falsely, and all mocked him. Then they made ready the Princess Isolt to go with Tristan; and the queen prepared a magic drink, and bade Brangæne guard it carefully, and on the marriage night to give it to Isolt and King Mark, that they might love each other for ever after, for it was a love-potion.

There was great sorrow when Isolt bade farewell to her land, and sailed away with Tristan. Wrathful she was, for she had in no wise forgiven him for having slain her uncle; and when Tristan said it was surely better to be the wife of a great king, even in a distant land, than to marry one

of no account in her own, she answered Nay, she deemed it were better even to marry the steward, so she might dwell among her own people.

Now on the voyage they put into a haven for rest, and all went on shore save Tristan and Isolt, and a little waiting-maiden; and since it was hot and they were thirsting, Isolt bade the maiden bring them to drink, and she went to search for wine, and saw the love-potion and knew not what it was, but thought it to be wine, and brought it to her mistress, and she and Tristan drank of it. And even as they had drunk Brangæne came back to the ship, and saw what had befallen, and threw the vessel into the sea, but told not what had happened. Tristan and Isolt loved each other, and ere they came to Cornwall each knew the heart of the other, and they were even as husband and wife. Before they landed Isolt prayed Brangæne that she would take her place with King Mark on the marriage night; and since Brangæne held that she was to blame since she had not watched the love-potion better, she consented, and so it was done, and King Mark had no thought but that it was Isolt who lay beside him.

But Queen Isolt grew afraid lest Brangæne should betray her to her husband, King Mark, and so she plotted to slay her; and she sent her forth into the wood to gather herbs for medicine,

with two serving-men whom she had secretly bidden to slay her, and bring back her tongue as proof they had done the queen's bidding. When Brangæne saw the men would slay her she prayed for her life, and they asked in what way she had offended the queen; and Brangæne said she knew not, save that when they left Ireland each brought with them a white robe, and because of the heat and the sun the queen wore hers on the voyage and soiled it, but Brangæne kept hers hidden away in a chest. Then on the marriage night the queen would fain have borrowed Brangæne's robe, but at first she would not lend it to her lady—and she spake, save that, she knew not how she had offended. The men pitied her and tied her to a tree, and left her alive, and cut out the tongue of a dog, and brought that to the queen. Isolt asked if Brangæne were slain, and what she had said; and when they told her, then she knew her kinswoman was faithful, and was wroth with them for her death. Then the serving-men told her the truth, and she brought Brangæne back to the court and held her henceforward in love and honour.

Now one day a minstrel from Ireland named Gandîn came to the court of King Mark, and played so sweetly that the king promised to give him whatever he should ask. Gandîn asked

for the queen, and since he would have no other gift, and the king must needs stand by his word, he was forced to let him take Queen Isolt with him. But the tide was low, and they must perforce wait on the shore till the boat could sail; and meanwhile Tristan came, and, hearing the story, sought the tent in the guise of a harper, and played so sweetly that the tide rose without Gandîn marking it, and they must needs wade on horseback to the ship. Then Isolt said none but the harper should take her over, and Tristan mounted her on his horse, set spurs to the steed, and so carried her back to Tintagel.

None at the court suspected the love of Tristan and Isolt, till one night the steward Marjodo, who was Tristan's room-mate, awoke, and Tristan was not there; then he rose and traced him by his footsteps—for it was winter and snow lay on the ground—to the queen's bower, and knew he was Isolt's lover. He bade the dwarf Melot watch the two, and he also saw the truth. Marjodo and Melot spake to King Mark and said it was whispered abroad that his wife and his nephew had betrayed him; but since Brangæne was wise and cunning, and bade Isolt follow her counsel as to her words and actions, the king could in no way find out how the matter really lay. Then at Melot's counsel he went on a hunt, but Tristan feigned sickness, and remained at the court. Bran-

gæne bade him, if he would see the queen, cut T and I on pieces of wood, and throw them into the stream that flowed past the queen's bower, and she would meet him on the bank; and so they did, but Melot watched them, and bare word to King Mark. The king came back in secret, and he and Melot hid in the tree beneath which the lovers were used to meet; but it was a moonlit night, and Tristan marked the shadows of the twain amid the branches on the grass, and went not to meet Isolt; and when the queen came she too saw the shadows, and stood apart; and the two spake in such wise of the king's suspicions, and of his evil counsellors, that Mark deemed they were in truth innocent, and so for a time he was at peace.

But since the love of the two could not be hidden, he grew to suspect them again; and because he could in no wise come at the truth, he summoned a council, and they deemed it well that, to set men's minds at rest, the queen should be tried by the ordeal of the red-hot iron. And Isolt spake that she was willing, but in her heart she feared greatly. Then she bethought her of a wile, and she bade Tristan secretly disguise himself, and when she came to the place where the ordeal should be held to be near at hand; and when the day came, and the boat drew near to land—for they went by water—Tristan, clad in

pilgrim garb, stood on the shore. Then the queen said that none but the holy man should carry her to land, and it was done; and the queen went to the minster and sware that none save her husband and the pilgrim had held her in their arms, and she took the red-hot iron in her hand, and it burned her not—so all deemed that she had spoken the truth, for none knew that the pilgrim was Tristan.

Then Tristan went for a space into Wales, and sojourned at the court of Duke Gilan, but ever he thought of Isolt and was sad and mournful. Then the duke bade them bring his dog, Petit-criu, which had been sent him as a love-token by a fay in Avelun; and the dog was of many colours, and bare a bell round its neck, and when the bell rang all those who heard it forgat whatever grief or sorrow they felt before. Then Tristan would fain have won the dog for Isolt, but Duke Gilan would not give it to him till Tristan had slain a giant who ravaged his kingdom; and then, though he would lieve have given him his sister to wife with half his kingdom, since Tristan would have nothing but Petit-criu he gave the dog unto him, and Tristan sent it by a sure hand to Isolt. But the queen thought it ill that she should forget while Tristan was in sorrow, and she brake the bell from off the dog's neck, so that it rang no more.

And after a time Tristan returned to the court, but they could not hide their love, and King Mark saw that his wife looked more kindly on his nephew than on him, and grew so wrathful that he banished the twain from the court. Then they went forth into the woodland, and Tristan led Isolt to a fair cave-dwelling (*Minnegrotte*) made in the days of the giants, and there they abode, and Tristan hunted in the woods, and Kurvenal alone knew where they were.

Now it came to pass that after a time King Mark went a-hunting in these very woods, and the lovers heard his horn, and, fearing lest he should surprise them, when they laid them down to rest they placed Tristan's unsheathed sword between them. And even as they feared it happened, for the chief huntsman found the grotto and told the king how a man and a goddess dwelt within it; and the king came and looked through the window and knew his wife and nephew, but since he saw the naked sword between them he held that they were innocent of wrong against him; and he laid flowers and leaves against the window lest the sun should wake them, and left them and went his way for the time.

Then he sent messengers to bid Tristan and Isolt back to the court; but he bade them beware, and see that none should find occasion against them, but to keep apart. Now this caused the

twain much sorrow, and ever when occasion offered Isolt would send for Tristan in secret; and one day it came to pass that King Mark surprised them in the garden, and he doubted no more, but knew that what he feared was the truth. Then Tristan fled for his life, and went to Arundel, the land of Duke Jovelîn, 'twixt Brittany and England; and the duke had a son, Kaêdîn, and a daughter, Isolt of the white hand. Now the maiden fell in love with Tristan, and, since he was ever singing songs of Isolt, she, and those around her, deemed that he loved her in return; and in truth Tristan himself began to think that since Queen Isolt sent not for him, and asked naught of his welfare, she had forgotten him, and he might well wed Isolt of the white hand.

Here Gottfried's poem breaks off abruptly, and, as said before, the version followed by his continuators is not that of the French poem from which he drew. We have, however, fragments of Thomas's poem, which also appears to be the source of the Northern versions, and can therefore tell with fair accuracy how the story ended; in fact, there is a general agreement among the differing versions on this point.

Tristan does marry the white-handed Isolt, but from a sentiment of fidelity to his first love she remains his wife only in name. Her brother

discovers this, and resents it as an insult, till Tristan explains to him the truth, when the two journey to Tintagel, and Kaêdîn, beholding with his own eyes the surpassing beauty of Isolt *la blonde*, holds Tristan fully justified. (From the various versions it is difficult to say how often the lovers meet. On at least one occasion Tristan visits the queen in the disguise of a fool.) Kaêdîn himself is in love with a lady who is kept imprisoned by her jealous husband; with Tristan's aid he visits her; they are pursued by the enraged husband, who kills Kaêdin, and wounds Tristan with a poisoned weapon. Tristan, knowing that none save Isolt can heal the wound, sends a messenger, in some versions Kurvenal, to beseech her aid, bidding him on the return voyage hoist a *white* sail if Isolt accompanies him, a *black* should she turn a deaf ear to his prayer. Isolt of the white hand overhears this, and when the ship returns bearing the queen who has forsaken all for her love, she of set purpose (or as some versions have it, by mistake) tells her husband that the sail is black, whereon Tristan, '*who has held his life till then*,' turns to the wall and breathes his last with Isolt's name on his lips. The queen arrives to find the land plunged in mourning for Tristan, lays herself on the bier beside him, and dies. King Mark, informed of their death, and learning for the first time of the fatal love-potion, orders

the two lovers to be buried in the same chapel but at different sides of the building, when a rose grows from Tristan's tomb and a vine from that of Isolt, and the branches of the two reach towards each other, and finally entwine.

Tristan and Isolde

THE DRAMA

CHAPTER XII

Tristan and Isolde

ARGUMENT

Tristan, the nephew of King Mark of Cornwall, has slain the Irish champion Morold, and freed Cornwall from the tribute imposed by Ireland. To seal peace between the kingdoms, Isolde, the princess of Ireland, once betrothed to Morold, is to wed King Mark, and the drama opens on her voyage to Cornwall, under the conduct of Tristan.

Isolde, who considers the terms of the treaty an insult to her country, is bitterly resentful of her position; she is not only unwilling to marry King Mark, but unconsciously in love with Tristan, whom, as the minstrel Tantris, she had healed of the wound inflicted by Morold. She believes herself to be still desirous of avenging the death of her betrothed, and resolves to terminate a situation she finds intolerable by poisoning both herself and Tristan in a cup, ostensibly of reconciliation, which she offers him at the approaching termination of the voyage. Her serving-maid Brangäne, aware of her intention, endeavours to frustrate it by substituting a love-potion for the death-drink, with the result that Tristan and Isolde declare their mutual passion at the very moment when King Mark reaches the vessel to claim his bride.

In the Second Act we find the lovers, utilising the opportunity afforded by a midnight hunt undertaken by King Mark, giving each other tryst in the garden of the palace, where, at daybreak, they are surprised by the king, led by Tristan's treacherous friend, Melot, who has planned the hunt with the view of surprising the lovers. Tristan draws his sword upon the traitor, and falls, mortally wounded.

In the Third Act, Tristan has been transported by his faithful servant, Kurwenal, to his own castle in Brittany, where he

lies wounded to death, and awaiting with impatience the coming of Isolde, whom Kurwenal has summoned to his aid. Isolde arrives, but too late to save the life of her lover, who expires of joy at the meeting. King Mark, who has learned from Brangäne the secret of the love-potion, follows Isolde with the intention of resigning her to Tristan, but his landing is opposed by Kurwenal, who slays Melot, and is himself mortally wounded, and the king only reaches the castle to find Tristan dead, and to hear the death-song of Isolde as she expires on the body of her lover.

The hero's parentage—His nationality—Professor Zimmer's theory—Germanic origin of Isolde—Morold—Scene of the conflict—Northern elements in the saga—The 'swallow' tradition—The healing of Tantris—The queen-mother—The love-potion—Wagner's treatment of the incident—Brangäne and Kurwenal—The meeting of the lovers—Melot—King Mark—Development and deterioration of the character—Cligés—The castle of Tristan—Isolt of the white hand—Mythical origin of the story—Death of Tristan—Affinity with classic legend—Death of Isolde—Concluding remarks.

It is with some diffidence that one approaches the discussion of the Tristan drama; so much has already been written upon the subject, and Wagner's choice and treatment of the legend have already been so amply criticised, both from a favourable and an unfavourable point of view. Still, as is unfortunately the case in most of these questions of research into the origin and growth of the principal mediæval legends, the results achieved have been mainly the fruit of the labours of foreign scholars, and are therefore inaccessible to many English admirers of the master. In

the case of Tristan, as in that of Siegfried and Perceval, and indeed of all the heroes the recital of whose gallant deeds formed so large a part of the literature of our ancestors, the last word has not yet been spoken; though the outline of the story be here simpler and less complicated than in some of the other legends we have discussed, there are many points not yet satisfactorily explained, and we shall probably find on examination that the problems involved are more intricate than we at first supposed them to be.

As we have indicated in the previous chapter, Wagner tells the story of Tristan and Isolde with far greater brevity than did his predecessors—he drops all the early history of his hero, though we gather from Tristan's words in the Third Act that the circumstances of his parentage and birth agree with the indications of the legend, *i.e.* that his father was slain in battle *before* his birth (which points to an affinity between Tristan and the 'Formula' heroes already discussed), and that his mother died immediately after bringing him into the world. Wagner, however, never gives the name of Tristan's parents, as he does in the parallel case of Parsifal. According to one tradition, that followed both by Eilhart von Oberge and Gottfried, and probably the older, his father was Riwalîn, his mother, Blansche-flur. The latter is a favourite name in mediæval romance,

and, according to *Li Conte del Graal*, was also the name of Perceval's wife. It has been suggested that the name Kondwiramour, in the *Parzival*, was substituted by Wolfram in order to avoid confusion with Tristan's mother. Wolfram evidently knew the Tristan of Eilhart (Gottfried's is, of course, later than the *Parzival*), for he mentions Riwalîn as present at the tourney of Kanvoleis, and also refers to 'Morold of Ireland' and 'the twain Isolde.'[1] In the French prose versions, which are followed by the *Morte d'Arthur*, Tristan's father is Meliodas, and his mother Elizabeth; with this exception the names of the actors in the story vary so far only as is necessitated by the transmission from one tongue to another.

The question of Tristan's nationality is an interesting one, involving as it does important points relative to the origin and evolution of the story. It was long supposed that both his name and that of Isolde were derived from Welsh originals, Essylt being the original form of Isolt or Iseult, and much being made of the connection between this Essylt and a certain Tristan or Trystan, son of Tallwch. But Professor Zimmer, in a most interesting article in the *Zeitschrift für französische sprache* (No. XIII.), has attacked and practically demolished this theory. He subjects

[1] Cf. *Parzival*, Book ii. line 438; Book i. line 1445; Book ii. line 442; Book iv. line 247.

the name of Tristan to an exhaustive examination, arriving at the conclusion that previous to the eleventh century the name was unknown in Wales, Cornwall, or Brittany, and further proves by analysis and comparison that the root from which the advocates of the Welsh theory derive the name could not have undergone the philological changes necessary for the evolution of the form Tristan. On the other hand, he shows that the name Drust, Drustán, Drostán, which would eventually give Drystan = Trystan (*d* and *t* being interchangeable), was a very ordinary name among the Pictish kings. It is not disputed that in early Welsh versions Drystan is found as an equivalent form for Trystan, and German scholars have now very generally accepted the conclusion that Tristan is a name of Pictish origin, *i.e.* of the north-east of present Scotland. The derivation from the French *triste* was of course a later thought, suggested by the melancholy circumstances attending the birth of the hero.

Now, what of Isolde? Before Professor Zimmer had advanced his theory many scholars had asserted that the name had, as a fact, far more affinity with Germanic forms than with the Kymric Essylt, but the fact of Isolde's being traditionally an Irish princess seemed to point, of necessity, to a Celtic origin. Here Zimmer recalls to our minds the fact that in the ninth century

(to which period he assigns the historical basis of the legend) the king who held his court at Dublin (Dĕvelîn) was not Irish, but a Northman, a Viking. That Ireland was, in the ninth and tenth centuries, overrun by North Sea pirates is well known, nor is it disputed that Dublin was, for many years, the capital of a Viking kingdom; in the ninth century the whole island was under the sway of a Danish king. That a princess of Dublin should bear a Germanic name is not merely probable, but natural, and consequently we find that German scholars give as the derivation of the name Isolde, Îswalt, or Îswalda (*Eis-walterin*=ruler of the ice), which explains the fact that the early German form seems to be Îsalde, as in Wolfram, and not Îsolde. The heroine then is no Celtic maiden, but a child of the North, a Viking's daughter; hence the legends always represent her as fair and golden-haired — she is '*die lichte*' in the Northern versions, as distinguished from '*die schwarze*,' the rival Isolde.

Another most interesting feature pointed out by Zimmer is that it was a Pictish custom to inherit through the *mother*, and not through the father; the records of the Pictish kings give numerous instances of brother succeeding brother, the mother's name always appearing in the genealogies. After the death of the last brother the *sister's* son would succeed. Tristan, therefore, is not merely

the adopted son of King Mark, as the legend represents, but rightful heir to the kingdom through his mother.

The historical groundwork of the legend Zimmer sums up as follows:—

Tristan's father, according to Gottfried, bore the surname of Kanêlengres; this is simply the Englishman(=Angle) of Carlisle—Loengres being the same as Loegria, Logris, Locris, which is well known as a name for Saxon Britain, and Kanoel one of the many varying forms of King Arthur's famous city. Parmenie=Bernicia, the Northern Angle kingdom.

Riwalîn, or Kanêlengres, holds his land in fief from Morgan (a British chief whose kingdom was probably just across the border, in Strathclyde or *South-West* Scotland), and journeys to the court of the king of the Southern Picts (who probably occupied a *South-Eastern* position corresponding to that of Morgan), where he marries the Pictish princess, sister to the king. War breaking out between his suzerain and the Picts, Riwalîn goes to the aid of Morgan, is slain, and his wife dies of grief, having borne a son to whom is given the royal Pictish name of Drustan, he being heir to the Pictish throne. We can therefore easily understand why Tristan gives up the land inherited through his father, and merely held in fief, and goes to the court of King Mark, whose heir he rightfully is. It would be quite unnecessary for Mark to vow not

to marry; even if he had a son, Tristan's prescriptive right to the crown would not be thereby affected; the introduction of this feature is probably a later addition, after the story had migrated from its original home, and the significance of the relative position of Tristan and King Mark had been forgotten.

Tristan, or Drustan, is sent by his uncle to demand the hand of the daughter of the king of Dublin; it is quite possible, considering the manner in which Scotland was invaded, and the western part settled by immigration from Ireland, that the Picts and the Vikings *had* come into contact, and the marriage may well have been the result of a treaty between contending chiefs.

This, briefly, is Professor Zimmer's theory of the historical basis for the Tristan legend, and it appears, on the whole, to have won very general acceptance; it certainly has the advantage of being in itself a rational theory, and also strictly accordant with acknowledged facts of history.

In the ultimate diffusion of the legend, Zimmer, with M. Gaston Paris, considers that the Norman Conquest played an important part.

The army of the Conqueror, in which there was a large Breton element, having learned the saga in their expeditions to the more northern part of England, where it was well known, carried it with them into Wales, towards the end of the eleventh

century, and then home to Brittany, from whence, having incorporated into itself certain names of Breton origin, it crossed back again into Cornwall; Tristan's uncle, hitherto unnamed, receiving the name of a Cornish chief, Mark, who was identified with the historical sixth century Cornish chieftain of that name.[1] Wagner opens his drama, then, after the events of his hero's youth, and at the conclusion of what we may call the historical foundation of the legend, *i.e.* the expedition of Tristan to Ireland to woo a bride for his uncle, King Mark.

And here we must remark at the outset that the Isolde of Wagner's drama is a much more fateful and imposing personality than is the Isolt of the legend. True, Gottfried represents her as bitterly resentful of her uncle's death, and as strongly, and not unnaturally, unwilling to leave her home and friends for a foreign land, but there is no trace of the outraged and insulted dignity which is so strong a feature in Wagner's heroine; and in fact, if Zimmer be right, there was, in the original story, no insult involved. King Mark, whether we con-

[1] Zimmer's theory is weakest as offering no solid ground for the throwing back of the legend from the ninth to the sixth century. The reason, if the theory is well founded, probably was that, as the Bretons looked on the latter, the period of their settlement in Brittany, as their heroic age, they naturally transferred a foreign story to it. It is a fact that the social conditions of Ireland and Northern Scotland in the ninth and tenth centuries do closely tally with the fundamental *données* of the legend.—(A. N.)

sider him as king of the Picts, or of 'Cornwall and England,' was a much more important personage than the chief of a Viking settlement, who might at any time be driven from his position by a concerted rising on the part of the original inhabitants of the island (a fate which did eventually befall the Danish king of Ireland, previously referred to), and the alliance was distinctly a desirable one; and so we find in Gottfried that both Gurmun and his queen are fully alive to the advantages of such an offer for their daughter. Nor does Isolt herself deny that Mark was a far more fitting mate than any to be found in Ireland.

We accept Wagner's version as explanatory of the character of his heroine, but we cannot admit that it represents accurately either the tradition itself or the historical facts behind that tradition. At no time could any of these predatory Irish chieftains have held a position of such military importance that it would have been derogatory to their dignity to wed their daughter to a British king.[1]

The position is also aggravated in the drama by the fact that Morold, slain by Tristan, is here represented as having been Isolde's betrothed instead of her uncle, as in the legend. Morold, or Morholt, is

[1] Gottfried represents Gurmun as holding Ireland 'by permission' of the Romans. Is this, perhaps, a reminiscence of the grant of Ireland to King Henry II. by Pope Adrian IV. in 1154?

in all the versions a somewhat important personage, in whom some critics have discovered a sea-monster, akin to the Minotaur of the Theseus legend, with which the Tristan story certainly has important points of contact. This interpretation seems to rest on the identification of the first syllable of the name with the Celtic word for *sea*; but the name is also capable of a Germanic derivation (from *Môr-walt*), and the fact that he is always closely connected with the heroine seems rather to conflict with the notion of a 'monstrous' origin. It is very probable that Morold was a Viking, and with this would agree the fact that, though a valiant warrior, his methods of warfare do not seem to have been exactly in accordance with the rules of knightly conduct and courtesy.

> 'Môrhôlt in einen rîter stal,
> ûzem sâtel er in für sich huop
> (daz was ein ungefüeger uop).'
> *Parzival*, Book ii. 442 *et seq.*

It is a curious feature in the legend that the contest between Morold and Tristan is fought, not on the mainland, but on an island (now identified as St. Sanson, one of the Scilly group), whither the two heroes repair, unattended; Malory also giving the same account. Now this is distinctly a North Sea feature, the resort to an island for single combat being a Northern custom, and known by the definite term of *Holm-gang*. Thus the

conflict with Morold may justly be reckoned among the Northern, or Germanic, elements of the story, while the nature of the tribute recalls the legend of Theseus, and is rather to be reckoned to the classic parallels.

We may here mention a variant of the story found in the versions we have designated as French or Minstrel, and expressly condemned by Gottfried, viz. that a swallow from Ireland brings a golden hair into Mark's hall, and the king vows he will marry no maiden save her to whom this hair belongs. Tristan therefore sets forth on his voyage, unknowing in what direction he shall seek for the golden-haired maiden, and comes by chance to Dublin. It is difficult to say whether the episode ever really formed part of the story; it is certainly quite out of harmony with the version familiar to us, as it would necessitate Tristan's never having visited Ireland previously, or having failed to see Isolde on that previous visit. Nor is the incident peculiar to the Tristan-saga; it finds numerous parallels in Märchen, and is akin to the classic myth of Rhodope.

There seems to be some confusion in the story relative to the healing of Tristan (or Tantris). Gottfried ascribes it to the queen, Isolt's mother; Malory, who follows the prose versions, to the maiden herself, and this, the version adopted by Wagner, is probably the correct one. This queen-

mother, with her skill in magic and divination, versed in healing arts and the brewing of magic potions, strongly recalls the queen-mother of the Siegfried-saga; and as we saw there that the personalities of mother and daughter intermingle, and the same name, Grimhild, is applied to both, so this queen-mother and daughter, bearing the same name, and sharing (as we finally see) the same magic gift of healing, may well have been originally but one personality. And as in the Northern sagas we find mother and daughter, alternately the one and the other, fierce and treacherous, so we find in the Tristan legend: sometimes it is the daughter who, taking Tantris at a disadvantage, would slay him, but is withheld by the mother; sometimes it is the daughter who stays the mother's avenging hand.

The idea that the love of Tristan and Isolde really dates, as in the drama, from the period of their first meeting, is not unknown to the later versions of the legend, when, probably, the belief in philtres and love-potions was somewhat waning; but, originally, there is little doubt that the Minstrel held the fatal passion of the two lovers to be due to the *Minnetranc* alone. How important a part such magic drinks played in old romance the story of Siegfried has shown us; the belief in them was practically universal, but it seems to have been especially strong in the North,

and there closely connected with what we may almost call the 'science' of runes. It may well be that the love-potion of the Tristan-saga is closely connected with the Germanic origin of the heroine, and its fatal influence may be paralleled with that of the 'drink of forgetfulness' given to Siegfried by Grimhild—the eventual cause of the death of the Northern hero.

It is in Wagner's treatment of this incident that we become clearly aware of the manner in which his conception of the story differs from that of his predecessors. M. Gaston Paris has clearly pointed out that a tragic termination is an essential necessity to such a story as that of Tristan and Isolde if the recital of their love is to belong to the region of 'great poetry.' In any other case the story would be distasteful, if not actually repulsive; it is by their suffering and their death that the unhappy lovers preserve their hold upon our sympathies. Now, from the very commencement of the Wagner drama this truth is emphasised, and the idea of love is never presented to our minds apart from the, here, correlative idea of death. By so doing, Wagner has provided a subtle alternative for those analytical minds which desire to penetrate below the surface and refuse to be satisfied with the outward presentation of the dramatic situation. Traditionally, the love of Tristan and Isolde is the result of the love-potion and of that alone; pre-

viously Isolde was bitterly incensed against Tristan, and Tristan was indifferent to Isolde. Dramatically, the effect of the love-drink is to quicken into full and conscious life and flower a seed already germinating. Psychologically, it is the near presence of death, believed by both to be imminent, which reveals the heart of each to the other and to themselves—face to face with death men speak the truth, so Tristan and Isolde drink the cup of death, and it operates to the revelation of love.[1]

Thus the magic drink of the legend loses none of its importance in the drama, but, while it gives opportunity for a scene of the highest dramatic intensity, interprets itself in a manner clearly intelligible to modern minds. It may, however, be questioned whether there is not in reality a

[1] It must not be thought, however, that this union of the idea of Love and Death is entirely due to Wagner, or absent from the older poem; though it is not till after the lovers have learned the nature of the drink that they apprehend the full meaning first put in words by Brangæne:—

'daz selbe glas
und der tranc der da inne was
Der ist iuwer beider tôt,'
. . . . .
'nu walte es got!' sprach Tristan
'ez wære tôt oder leben:
ez hât mir sánfté vergeben.
i'ne wéiz, wie jener werden sol:
dirre tôt der tuot mir wol.
Solté diu wunneclîche Isôt
iemer alsus sîn mîn tôt,
sô wolte ich gerne werben
umb' ein êweclîchez sterben.'

Tristan, xviii. 12,491 *et seq.*

deeper tragedy in the old versions of the story which represent the cup as drained carelessly and lightly, and thus turn the refreshing drink of a summer's day into a draught empoisoning the very springs of life. In the drama a tragic result is foreseen alike by hero and heroine; in the legend it overwhelms them with the inexplicable suddenness of a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky.

And here we may turn for a moment to the two characters, who, after the hero and heroine, support the main weight of the story. Wagner has been very impartial in his treatment of Brangäne and Kurwenal; in the drama both play *rôles* of equal importance, in the legend Brangæne is decidedly the more prominent of the two. She appears in all the versions. In Gottfried, as we have seen, she is kinswoman to Isolt; the queen calls her 'Brangæne hôvesche niftel,' and the adjectives *hôvesche, stolze,* are constantly applied to her; while she is likened to the moon, when Isolt and her mother are spoken of as the sun and the rosy dawn.

At the time Gottfried wrote, *niftel* was not used in its later and narrower sense of *niece,* but was applied to any female relative on the mother's side, so we cannot determine the exact relationship between Isolt and Brangæne; but their relative position is evidently a very different one from that of the drama, and it appears rather as if Bran-

gæne, and not Isolt, were the master mind. In Malory, too, she is 'Dame' Bragwaine and the queen's 'lady'; she seems, altogether, to be rather a lady-in-waiting than a serving-maid.

The name varies very little, and the origin appears to be uncertain; some scholars connect it with the Kymric Branwen, and Golther, who otherwise suggests non-Celtic derivations for most of the names, does not offer any other identification.

Throughout the legend it is Brangæne who is, directly or indirectly, responsible for the drinking of the fatal cup, the result being brought about, as a rule, by her lack of care in guarding the precious flask. It is worthy of note that in all the early versions of the legend Brangæne disappears before the end of the story. We hear of Kurvenal as sent to summon Isolt to the dying Tristan, but Brangæne does not, as we should expect, accompany her lady. Two of Gottfried's continuators, Ulrich von Türheim and 'The Unknown,' mention incidentally that she is dead, but their mention of the fact occurs in each case in a different connection, and it may be doubted whether the writers themselves did not introduce this as a reason for her disappearance from the story. If Brangæne did really die, one would expect, from the important part she plays in the narrative, that the circumstances attending her

death would be fully related; as it is, her disappearance is somewhat of a problem. Kurvenal, on the other hand, figures in the story till the last scene, and serves the lovers faithfully to the end (so that the final Act of the drama, in which Kurwenal dies and Brangäne alone of the four leading characters remains alive, practically reverses the situation in the legend). In the French versions of the story this character is known as Gouvernail, and the fact that he plays in the legend the part of tutor and 'governour' to the hero seems to explain the title. Probably this character was at first anonymous, but took the designation of his office, which in the German versions became transmuted into Kurvenal. This solution is at all events more probable than that which explains the name as a variation of Kurnewal = Cornwall. Kurvenal has no connection with that kingdom save through Tristan, and appears in the legend long before the hero's first visit to his uncle's land. In all the old versions of the story his status, as that of Brangæne, is far higher than in the drama.

We now come to the great Second Act, the cause, most probably, of the many adverse criticisms which have been passed upon the drama. It is quite impossible to study the legend in any of its earlier forms without being impressed with the superior skill and restraint with which Wagner

has treated the subject. We cannot read the long series of ruses by which the guilty pair endeavour to evade discovery and elude King Mark's justly aroused suspicions, without feeling that, charming as some of these episodes are in themselves, clothed in most poetical language, and treated as a rule (at least by Gottfried and his French original) with commendable delicacy, yet the conduct of Tristan and Isolt was absolutely indefensible, and their punishment, if punishment it were, wholly inadequate to their offence. But, for all this cycle of constantly recurring meetings and escapes, Wagner gives us but the one interview, and couches the speech of the lovers in a strain of lofty poetry which, while it impresses us with the reality and the humanity of their passion, yet keeps constantly before us the inevitable end which Isolde, at least, has foreseen from the beginning.

That Wagner did not intend to represent his lovers as standing in any other relation to each other, and to King Mark, than that of the lovers of the legend, is obvious, both from the fact that, however he may interpret and explain the characters of the heroes and heroines whom he places upon the boards, he in no case departs from the traditional relation of each to the other, which is of the essence of the different legends; and also from the speech which he puts into the mouth of

Brangäne when she warns her mistress against Melot, '*Tückisch lauschend treff' ich ihn oft,*' and the foreboding that his ostensible sympathy with, and aid to, the lovers only covers a set purpose of treason. To those familiar with the legend the hints thus given are enough; the characters are developed on a higher plane, but the background remains the same as of old.

In this character of the faithless friend Wagner has combined the two traitors of the poem, Marjodo and Melot. The object of the drama being to concentrate attention entirely upon the central figures of the story, the character of the traitor becomes one of very minor importance. Melot is little more than a sketch. This cannot be regretted; nevertheless, the Melot of the poem, the dwarf of Aquitane, with his skill in star-reading and secret lore, might, under other circumstances, have been developed into a very effective and picturesque feature.

Of course, Wagner's treatment of the story, summing up as it does all meetings in one, forbids us to seek in the legend an exact parallel to this Second Act; the circumstances approach most closely to those of the midnight meeting by the stream, when Mark, supposed to be absent on a hunting expedition, and summoned back by Melot, watches the lovers from his shelter in the branches of their trysting-tree. Though the final

discovery of the wrong done to Mark does not take place on this occasion, the scene is again a garden, and Wagner may therefore be held to have combined these two episodes.

In the language of the lovers we can still trace distinct echoes of the older version:

. . . . .
'ein lîp, ein leben daz sîn wir.
nu bedénket ie genôte
mich, iuwern lîp, Isôte.
lât mich an iu mîn leben sehen,
so ez iemer schierest müge geschehen,
und seht ouch ir daz iuwer an mir.
unser béider leben daz leitet ir.
nu gât her unde küsset mich:
Tristan und Isôt, îr und ich,
wir zwei sîn iemer beide
ein ding ân' underscheide.
dîrre kús sol ein insigel sîn,
daz ich iuwer unde ir mîn
belîben state unz an den tôt,
niwan éin Tristan und ein Isôt,'—[1]

though the ardent passion of love is in the drama overshadowed by that dark philosophy which seeks in death and absorption into the universal essence the solution of the problem, and the solace for the sorrows, of this mortal existence. Wagner's Tristan and Isolde may be as far removed mentally from the lovers of the original legend as the literature of the nineteenth century is apart, in point of time, from that of

[1] *Tristan und Isolde*, Book xxix. lines 18,348 *et seq.*

the twelfth, but the humanity and reality of their passion bridge the gap. It was as lovers that they were popular seven hundred years ago, and it is as lovers we regard them still; they are for us, as they were for Dante, among the shades of those '*che amor di nostra vita dipartille.*' To ninety-nine out of every hundred spectators of the drama Wagner's philosophy is practically non-existent, and it is Isolde's declaration of herself as love's 'vassal' which explains the situation. Tristan and Isolde have been claimed, and rightly, as the most successful of Wagner's attempts to embody metaphysical principles in dramatic form; but it may be doubted whether this success is not due to the intense humanity which was theirs before Wagner touched them—to that devouring flame of love which was vivid enough to illumine even metaphysics. Will any one seriously contend that metaphysics can illumine love?

In this Act, for the first time, King Mark comes upon the scene. Wagner has treated this character, which during the development of the legend has certainly suffered more severely than any other of the *dramatis personæ*, with great tenderness and skill. The King Mark of the drama is a thoroughly dignified and chivalrous figure, such as, one is inclined to think, the original legend probably conceived him. There are still traces in Gottfried of his gentleness, his warm affection for

wife and nephew, and unwillingness to think evil of those dear to him, which seem to show what the original conception had been; though the development of the story in the interest of the lovers, their danger, and their hairbreadth escapes, has operated to the decided weakening of the character.

Mark is too easily suspicious, too easily pacified, to produce an impression of strength or dignity; and in the later versions he becomes simply odious, cruel, crafty, and treacherous. The compilers seem to have felt that *some* excuse for the lovers' conduct, more comprehensible than the effect of a love-potion, was required, and to provide this excuse they painted the character of the husband as black as they possibly could.

There is a wild story, in some of the early versions, that Mark had 'horses' ears'—an evident imitation of the myth of Midas, and another instance of the classical elements affecting the legend—and the name has on that account been connected with the old Gaelic *marka* = horse. But the story is told of other heroes, and the name, according to Golther, is also capable of Germanic derivation. As we have said before, there is historical testimony for the existence of a Mark in Cornwall in the sixth century.

Here it may be interesting to note that mediæval literature contains a remarkable parallel to the

story of Tristan and Isolde in the *Cligés* of Chrêtien de Troyes, who, it may be mentioned, also wrote a *Tristan* which has, unfortunately, been lost. In *Cligés* the hero is nephew to the Emperor of Greece, who is pledged, by a promise to his brother, father of the hero, not to marry. He, however, breaks his word, and, yielding to the urgent prayers of his courtiers, determines to marry Phenice, the daughter of the Emperor of Germany. But when the princess arrives at the court, she and Cligés fall in love with each other, and by the skill of the waiting-maid, Thessala, who gives the emperor a magic drink on the wedding-night, the marriage remains but a form.

It is curious to find Phenice, in this context, blaming the conduct of Isolde, and practically using the words of Brynhild to Sigurd, that she will not have 'two kings in one hall.' Throughout the poem comparisons are constantly made between the lovers and Tristan and Isolde.

By the skill of Thessala, Phenice feigns death, is buried alive, and rescued by Cligés. The secret is successfully kept for some time, till by chance a courtier penetrates into the garden surrounding their retreat and discovers the two (exactly as Tristan and Isolde are discovered in the legend); the lovers fly to the court of King Arthur, but are followed by the news of the emperor's death;

Cligés succeeds to the throne, the two marry and 'live happy ever after.'

It will be noted how many points of resemblance there are between the two stories. Foerster, in the introduction to his edition of the poem, states that the loves of Cligés and Phenice are a free redaction of an Oriental tale, 'Salomon and Markolf,' and this would seem to point to the fact that it is no imitation of the Tristan-saga, but an independent variant. Golther, in his study of the legend of Tristan, seems to think that Thessala represents a classic original from whom Brangæne has borrowed characteristic traits; but Golther is avowedly trying to minimise the Celtic elements in the story, which somewhat weakens his position. The question is a very interesting one.

In the Third Act we are transported from Cornwall to Brittany, which country, in the majority of the versions, is the scene of Tristan's death. Gottfried, of course, does not finish his poem, but he places the home of Isolt of the white hand, with whose father Tristan takes refuge, in *Arundel*, 'between Cornwall and Brittany.'

Tristan's *own* castle is certainly not in Brittany, but in the North of England, at Kanoel = Carlisle, to which Wagner seems to refer when he calls it Karèol. But the shifting of the scene of the Arthurian legends from Britain proper to Brittany

caused a great confusion in the localities, and we find in the *Parzival* Karidol, which is certainly Carlisle, in Brittany. The later versions make Tristan 'of Lyonesse,' but it is doubtful whether this was in Brittany or in Cornwall.

The circumstances of the hero's death in the drama differ greatly from those of the legend; naturally, the concentration of the interest of the story on the two lovers forbids the introduction of so disturbing an element as the character of the second Isolt, whose action in the legend gives so tragical a character to the closing scenes.

But though unnecessary for dramatic purposes, in the criticism of the legend this character is of great importance; the existence of Isolt of the white hand seems to be the only clear trace now remaining of the originally mythic nature of the story, and it is only on the hypothesis of such a mythic origin that her presence can be satisfactorily accounted for.

One would rather not believe that Tristan was, even in appearance, faithless to his first love, and the fact that this disturbing element appears in every version of the story seems to show that it was felt to be an essential part of the original tale, and as such carefully preserved. The fact that the two rivals bear the same name tends to increase the perplexity, hinting as it does at an intimate connection between the two.

We have already pointed out that Tristan does possess certain points of contact with both Siegfried and Parsifal, whom we have seen to be representatives of an originally divine personality, a sun- or light-god; the probability is, therefore, that Tristan was at some distant period also a divine being, and in this character his connection with the rival Isolts would be capable of explanation either as a day- or a year-myth. It might be the Sun in relation to the Day and Night; or it might be the Sun-god in relation to the Earth in her spring and winter aspects. The first was probably the case, and the two Isolts represent respectively the Day and the Night.

Here it must be admitted that Wagner's philosophy has operated greatly to the obscuring of the original signification of the story, and has led to commentators on the drama speaking of Isolde as if she represented the influence of Night. This may be in agreement with Wagner's metaphysics, but it is absolutely contrary to the real meaning of the story regarded as a nature-myth. The real bride, the true love, of the Sun is the Day; Isolde is always represented in the legend as fair and golden-haired—one of her titles is *la blonde*; Tristan's death is directly brought about by his having, in appearance at least, deserted her for the second Isolt. The Northern versions, as we have remarked before, are quite clear as to the

distinction between the two Isolts,—they are '*die lichte*' and '*die schwarze*,' a piece of spontaneous testimony which cannot be ignored, though it is scarcely necessary; it is obvious that the Sun-god could not be punished for forsaking the Night, or the Spring-god die for deserting Winter!

But of course this mythical significance belongs to the prehistoric period of the Tristan myth, and has played but little part in its literary development; we cannot, therefore, press the parallel in details. The surviving features may be summed up in three: the circumstances of Tristan's birth, his slaying a dragon, and the existence of the rival Isolts.

In the circumstances surrounding Tristan's death the classic element, which we have already noted as existing in the saga, enters largely; critics have not failed to note the resemblance between Tristan wounded by a poisoned weapon and sending for healing to Isolde whom he has practically deserted, and Paris, wounded by the poisoned dart of Philoctetes, summoning to his aid Œnone whom he has forsaken for Helen. In the classic myth Œnone at first refuses her succour, but afterwards repents, and, arriving too late to save her lover, dies with him. It may be a mere coincidence, but if so it is curious, that Dante couples Paris and Tristan together; save in the concluding scene the stories do not appear to have

much in common. It is different with the Theseus story. We have remarked above on the strong resemblance between the tribute claimed by Gurmun, and that due to Minos, and have noted the fact that Morold has by some critics been held to be a monster akin to the Minotaur; and when we reach the final scene of Tristan's life as recounted in the legend, and evidently alluded to by Wagner, the resemblance between the white and black sails which are to announce from afar the coming of Isolde, or her refusal, and the white and black sails which are to make known to Ægeus the safety or death of his son, must strike the most casual reader. In each case, by malice or by accident, the message is wrongly read, and the error causes the death of the watcher.[1]

It will hardly be denied that the death of the lovers, tragic as it is in the drama, is less pathetic than in the legendary version. Tristan expiring in a delirious rapture of joy at the sight of Isolde touches us far less than Tristan deceived, and believing himself deserted, turning his face to the wall and breathing out his life with the utterance of Isolde's name; and not even the divine beauty

[1] A parallel to the final adventure of the legend in which Kaêdîn is slain and Tristan receives his death-wound is found in the excursion of Theseus to Hades with Peirithoos to carry off Persephone, in which Peirithoos meets with his death, and Theseus is chained to a rock in the lower world till released by Herakles.

of the 'Liebestod,' certainly to be reckoned among Wagner's highest achievements, can blind us to the fact that there is some truth in M. Gaston Paris's remark that there is more philosophy than love in Isolde's dying words. There is true poetry in the legendary version which represents her as laying herself down to die by her dead lover in sorrow too deep for speech. The old writers felt instinctively that they had no language to meet the situation, and the great tragedy of Tristan and Isolde ends in silence.

It is in full accord with tradition that King Mark should appear upon the scene, if not immediately after the death of the lovers, at least prior to their burial. In the legend he does not learn the secret of the fatal love-drink till both the victims of its influence are dead, but in Heinrich von Freiberg's continuation of Gottfried's poem we find him saying that had he known before he would have given Isolt to Tristan to wife: a statement which throws no doubt upon the fact of Mark's own marriage with the heroine, but rather indicates the early date of the legend, a period when the marriage-tie was but lightly held, and marriage itself probably but a civil ceremony, its essence consisting in the contract before witnesses. The offer is fully in accordance with what one cannot but believe was the originally chivalrous and generous character of the king.

That Malory, following the prose versions, represents him as slaying Tristan with his own hand, by a treacherous thrust in the back, is a striking proof of the deterioration which the character underwent.

The charming legend of the rose and the vine which sprang from the tombs of the lovers, though recounted in most of the versions, is in almost every instance accompanied by a qualifying statement which seems to show that the poets were somewhat doubtful as to the authenticity of this part of the story. Eilhart von Oberge says: '*ich enweiz ab ich ûch sagin mag, îdoch hôrte ich sagin alsus*' (Golther, p. 27), and it is probable that this episode, found also in connection with other heroes, formed no part of the original legend. Some readers may probably recollect the old English ballad of 'Lord Lovel,' where, though the story is perfectly distinct from that of Tristan, the conclusion is similar:

> 'Out of her bosom there grew a red rose,
> And out of Lord Lovel's a briar.'

One can scarcely conclude this study without some reference to the many adverse criticisms which have been passed upon the drama, rather from an ethical than a musical standpoint; criticisms which, so far as the libretto is concerned, we have endeavoured to show are quite undeserved. There are, of course, some minds to whom *any* story of

unlawful love is by virtue of its subject immoral, and as such, no matter how it is treated, for ever anathema. Such prejudices are honest, and to be respected, but we are nevertheless entitled to ask whether such a story as that of Tristan and Isolde, across which is writ in letters large 'The wages of sin is Death,' is not rather to be regarded as a salutary warning than as an apology or an encouragement?

Musically, the Tristan drama is by many competent critics considered to hold the first place among Wagner's works, as it is certainly the most successful of his metaphysical efforts. Ethically, any mischievous effects which may be ascribed to the drama are probably due not to the story itself but to the mistaken mental attitude of the hearers, a truth so admirably expressed by M. Gaston Paris that we make no apology for quoting his words: 'Le grand danger qu'elle offre c'est que, faite pour des natures et pour des situations exceptionnelles, elle' (that is, the theory of the irresponsibility of love) 'peut être et elle est souvent, invoquée en dehors des conditions qui seules pourraient la faire admettre: ces conditions, les poètes les imaginent sans peine, mais elles se rencontrent rarement dans la vie, et on est trop facilement porté à les croire réalisées pour soi.'

It is becoming the fashion nowadays to claim for the stage a position analogous to that of the

pulpit, to look upon the mission of the drama as one not merely of illustration but of guidance. The words of M. Paris point out the fallacy underlying this line of thought: dramatic situations to be effective must of necessity be exceptional, and therefore to regard them as excuses, much less as warrants, for action, can only lead to disastrous consequences.

But not only is this danger not peculiar to the Tristan drama, but it is shared in a far greater measure by a whole class of plays of the popularity of which there is no question, and which, clad in modern garb and framed in modern speech, are far more dangerous. The harm done by one alone of the many 'problem' plays of to-day, in all probability, already far outweighs any mischief which, during its whole career, will ever be wrought by such a drama as *Tristan and Isolde*.

Tannhäuser

THE LEGEND

CHAPTER XIII

Tannhäuser

The Tannhäuser legend—Its root in German mythology—The fate of the gods—Barbarossa—King Arthur—Freya and Venus—Hörselberg and Venusberg—The ballad of Tannhäuser.

THE legend which lies at the basis of the Tannhäuser drama, though it deals more directly with the personages of the other-world than any legend we have treated, save that of the Nibelungen Hoard, yet can claim no such origin in prehistoric myth as we have been enabled to trace in the stories hitherto treated. It is essentially of post-Christian origin and in form purely mediæval. Nor is it represented by any literature of equal importance even with that connected with the Swan-knight, much less comparable with the literature of Siegfried, Perceval, or Tristan. Nevertheless, the history of the belief which, probably towards the end of the thirteenth century, crystallised into the Tannhäuser legend is a deeply interesting one, and one closely bound up with the religious life of the German people. Our studies in the Nibe-

lungen legend have already shown us how deeply rooted in the natural phenomena of the land, how inwoven with the daily life of the folk, was the mythology of the North. It was no easy task which the apostles of Christianity set themselves when they undertook to dethrone the deities so securely enshrined in the outer life and inner being of their worshippers. Christianity triumphed, but the old gods, though defeated, were not destroyed, and even in their fall they were powerful enough to leave an indelible impression on the faith which took their place.

We have already seen (chapter vi.) how the Norns survive in Christian hagiology; and other German saints, such as S. Gertrude and S. Ursula, retain strong traces of their pagan origin; while in the representations of the Virgin Mother of our Lord we find unmistakable survivals of the kindly nature-goddesses—in the North, as elsewhere, Christianity did not destroy, but incorporated, the best features of the faith it supplanted.

But what became of the characters of the old mythology? To the minds of the simple folk who had loved and worshipped them they did not die but retired to hidden dwellings, mostly in woods and mountain caves, where some slumbered, and slumber still, till the need of their country shall arouse them to her aid; while others yet come forth to mingle in the affairs of men,

many natural phenomena being still in the minds of the common people attributable to their action.

To the first class of belief belong the stories of sleeping heroes so current among Northern nations. Barbarossa slumbering in his rock-cavern is, by his red beard, to be identified with Thor, though the ravens flying over the mountain without connect him with Odin. So too, in some legends, Arthur sleeps, or wakes, within a mountain dwelling; and, what is of special interest in connection with the legend we are about to examine, German fancy pictured the British hero as accompanied by personalities borrowed from classic myth:

> 'Felicia Sibillen kynt
> Unde Juno die mit Arthus in dem berge sint
> Die heben vleisch sam wir unde och gebeyne.'[1]

To the legends of the second class belongs the weird tale of the Wild Huntsman, which, with its kindred myths, we have already touched upon (chapter viii.). There we stated that the Wild Huntsman, originally Odin himself, had also a female counterpart, who bore various names, Herodias being one of them, but who, in the first instance, was to be identified with Odin's wife.

One of the most perplexing features which

[1] This passage may be found both in the *Wartburg-krieg*, p. 83 (Simrock's edition), and in the *Lohengrin*, line 251.

Northern mythology presents is the manner in which one mythic personality overlaps and merges into another, so that it becomes impossible to claim any special attribute or symbol as the exclusive property of any one god or goddess. Each divinity is not merely himself or herself, but eventually several other divinities, and the wide ground covered by the manifestations and development of what was originally a single conception becomes confusing in the extreme. Thus we find that the wife of Odin, Frigg, or Fricka, merges into Freya, who is represented also as the wife of the god (as she is the original Valkyrie, an attribute Fricka does not share).

But Freya has also features in common with Hel, the goddess of the under-world and of the dead, for half of those slain in battle belong to Freya. Nor is this irreconcilable with the fact that Freya is also a spring- or nature-goddess—a quality which belongs to her in her original character as one of the Vans, before adoption into the ranks of the Asas. Hel is not altogether a repellent personality; she is half white and half black (like Feirefis in *Parzival*), and it is her lighter, happier side which is represented by such goddesses as Berchta and Holda, who, when they issue from their mountain home to waken the earth to fresh life and secure a bountiful harvest, clearly show their identity with Freya; while as

guardians of the souls of the dead—for as such they appear, the souls of unbaptized infants especially being in Berchta's charge—their connection with Hel becomes manifest.

Hel herself, in her original conception, rarely leaves her underground dwelling; when she does, and rides abroad on her three-legged horse, plague and misfortune follow in her wake. Berchta and Holda, however, frequently issue forth, sometimes, as above, to awaken the earth from her winter sleep, sometimes with a following of departed souls. Simrock suggests that originally the personality of Holda=Holla may have been a less gracious one than now appears, *i.e.* that she may have represented specifically the *dark* side of Hel, while Berchta represented the *bright*; but the personalities are now practically identical.[1]

That through the incursions of the Romans a knowledge of the Latin deities early became introduced into Germany is certain; and if we compare the names given to the days of the week in languages respectively of Teutonic and

[1] The 'White Lady,' however, who appears in certain noble German families to forewarn of approaching death, is always Bertha, and never Holda.

Full discussion of these different goddesses, their attributes, and the manner in which the one merges into the other, will be found in Simrock's *Handbuch der deutschen Mythologie*, under the headings of their respective names.

Latin origin, we shall gain a very good idea of the deities who in the two mythologies were held to correspond most closely. Thus Thursday = Donnerstag = Jeudi = Giovedi, in each instance, indicates the god, whether Thor or Jove, who wielded the thunderbolt; and the Germanic Friday = Freitag is represented in Latin tongues by Vendredi = Venerdi, showing that, in the minds of those who named the sixth day of the week, the goddesses Freya and Venus represented kindred ideas.

When Christianity had fairly conquered the old faith, and the Northern gods and goddesses, from being merely the nature powers they originally represented, were degraded to the position of demons essentially evil, the worst characteristics of the Latin love-goddess were attributed to her Germanic counterpart, and with these characteristics, which certainly some features in the original Freya-myth might be held to justify, she also won the name. In many parts of Germany it was no longer Holda or Berchta who dwelt in the mountain caves, but Venus (who, in her later German name of Frau Frene, clearly proclaims her identity with Freya) who there held her court; and when she sallied forth, if she did not bring pestilence in her train, as did Hel, yet her influence was none the less fatal to all who beheld her beauty.

We shall probably be correct if we consider Venus as the presentation, from a Christian point of view, of a pre-Christian influence, more fairly interpreted by the national conception of Holda and Berchta. At first there was no specially *ethical* idea involved, the powers personified being mere forces of nature; and if we grasp the original character of the goddess who thus has an underground dwelling, we shall understand how, natural influences being operative all over the world, her dwelling was not confined to one place alone; and it will cause us no surprise to find that, though her most famous dwelling-place is in the Hörselberg, or Venusberg, in Thuringia, yet that other parts of Germany possess their Venusberg, and there is even one in Italy.

The fact that the principal Venusberg was earlier known as the Hörselberg clearly shows that the goddess who made it her home was of *Germanic*, and not of *Latin* origin. The derivation of the word is uncertain; it has by some been connected with Hörsel, or Ursel, a Swabian goddess who possesses features in common with Holda and Berchta; by others it is held to be a corruption of Asel = Öselberg, the mount of the Ase, *i.e.* of Odin. The tradition that the name arose from the exclamation *Hör' die Seele!* the cries of lost souls being heard within its

depths, could only have arisen after the real source of the name had been forgotten.[1]

It is to this Venusberg, near the castle of the Wartburg in Thuringia, that the principal legend dealing with the underground court of Venus attaches, the hero of the story being a real historical personality, a poet of the latter half of the thirteenth century. In this form it appears to have rapidly become popular; for though the literary forms of the story are considerably later, yet the fact that the characters figuring in it were really contemporaries seems to indicate that the story was fixed before anachronisms had time to creep in. It is as a folk-tale, principally in ballad form, that the legend of Tannhäuser has descended to us; one of the oldest of these ballads, that printed, with the original music, in Böhme's *Altdeutsches Liederbuch*, is here given in an English translation, as a specimen of the early form of the story.

TANNHÄUSER

Now list the tale I sing to thee,
All of a gallant knight,
And how he many a marvel wrought
With Venus, lady bright.

[1] The existence of such natural phenomena as musical mountains and singing sands, which give out a distinct musical sound when trodden upon, is now a well-proved fact; may it not be that the mysterious sounds which really appear to have been heard in the neighbourhood of the Hörselberg were due to some such cause?

Tannhäuser was that knight, I trow,
Great wonders would he see ;
He gat him to the Venusberg
Where many fair maids shall be.

'Tannhäuser, thou art aye my love,
Of this bethink thee well,
A solemn oath thou swarest me
With me for aye to dwell.'

'Nay, Venus, oath I never sware,
That will I fast deny ;
God help me wreak my wrath on him
Who sayeth that I lie !'

'What sayest thou, my gallant knight ?
With me thou sure shalt stay,
I'll give to thee my fairest maid
As wedded wife for aye.'

'Nay, an I took another wife,
I here bethink me well,
My lot for all eternity
Would be the flames of hell !'

'Why speak'st thou of the flames of hell
Who never felt their heat ?
Think thou upon my mouth so red
That ever smileth sweet.'

'What helpeth me thy mouth so red ?
'Tis weird and woe to me—
Nay, in the name of all fair maids,
Frau Venus, set me free !'

'Tannhäuser, askest leave of me?
No leave from me thou'lt win;
Stay thou, and lead a joyous life
The Venusberg within!'

'My life is waxen sick and faint,
No longer would I stay;
Now give me leave, my lady bright,
From thee I must away!'

'Nay, say not so, thou goodly knight,
Bethink thee of my power,
How Love's delights await us twain
Within my secret bower!'

'Thy love to me is loss, I trow;
And, so it seemeth me,
For all thy beauty, lady bright,
A Devil shalt thou be!'

'Tannhäuser, speakest thus to me?
Dost dare thy queen to chide?
Now for these words thou sure shalt pay
An here thou wouldst abide!'

'Nay, Venus, I abide not here,
Think not thou holdest me—
Now, Mary Mother, maiden mild,
Help thou, and set me free!'

'Tannhäuser, thou canst get thee gone—
Where'er thy steps shall stray
My praise be sung; now crave thy leave
From him, the old man grey.'

Now hath he left the Venusberg
In grief and sorrow sore;
'I will to Rome to seek the Pope,
And pardon there implore.'

'And gladly will I wend my way,
God ruleth over all;
I seek a Pope, Urban his name,
To raise me from my fall.'

'Ah! hear me, good my lord the Pope,
My guilt I mourn to-day,
How I, in this my life, have sinned
I fain to thee would say.

'A whole year long with Venus fair
I dwelt—Ah! woe is me—
Now I confess, and penance crave
That I God's face may see.'

A staff the Pope held in his hand,
'Twas dead, and dry, and brown—
'This staff shall bud and bloom again
Ere grace to thee be shown!'

'Now might I live upon this earth
A year, but one short year,
In pain and penance sore I'd strive
Till God my prayer should hear!'

So passed the knight from out the town
In grief and woe of heart—
'Ah! Mary Mother, maiden mild,
From thee I now must part.'

He goeth to the Venusberg
For all eternity—
'To Venus must I take my way,
For God, He sendeth me!'

'Welcome to thee, thou goodly knight,
In sooth I mourned thee sore;
Tannhäuser! welcome to my arms,
My lover evermore.'

Now scarcely had the third day dawned,
The staff grew green and bright;
The Pope, he sendeth through the land
To seek the wandering knight.

But he hath sought the Venusberg,
Hath chosen his love for aye—
And Pope Urban's soul shall be counted lost,
Cometh the Judgment Day!

Tannhäuser

THE DRAMA

CHAPTER XIV

Tannhäuser

ARGUMENT

The Minstrel-knight, Tannhäuser, ensnared by the charms of Venus, has become an inmate of her court in the Venusberg; but, weary of the sensual pleasures which surround him, is desirous of returning to the upper-world. Venus puts forth all the resources of her court and of her own charms to detain him, but, finding it impossible to regain her influence, prophesies that, rejected and outcast by the world, he shall return a suppliant to her feet. Tannhäuser cries on the Blessed Virgin for aid, and the Venusberg and its court vanishes.

The knight finds himself in the near neighbourhood of the Wartburg, a shepherd-boy near at hand pipes a song in praise of the spring-goddess Holda, and the chant of pilgrims is heard in the distance. A hunting-party enters, and the Landgrave and his attendant knights recognise Tannhäuser, who has mysteriously disappeared from their circle. At first Tannhäuser is unwilling to rejoin his former companions, but when Wolfram von Eschenbach reveals to him that the Landgrave's niece, Elizabeth, is sorrowing for his absence, and has withdrawn from the court festivities, he consents to return.

A great feast is to be held at the Wartburg, and, previous to the entry of the guests, Tannhäuser and Elizabeth meet in the hall of song and confess their mutual love; a death-blow to the hopes of Wolfram, who has long loved Elizabeth in secret. On the arrival of the guests the knights are to compete in song, the subject of their theme being Love, and the prize to be awarded by Elizabeth. Wolfram's name is first drawn, and he sings in praise of love as a distant worship of an unattainable ideal, thereby arousing the opposition of Tannhäuser, whose idea of love as a passion which, ever gratified, is yet never satisfied, stirs the other knights to indignation. Gradually Tannhäuser loses control over himself, and finally bursts forth in praise of

Venus, revealing the fact of his residence in the Venusberg. The guests rush from the hall in horror at his avowal, and the knights draw their swords to slay the sinner, when Elizabeth throws herself between them and prays for the life of Tannhäuser, that he may at least find space for repentance. The Landgrave decrees that he shall join the train of pilgrims encamped beneath the castle on their way to Rome, and Tannhäuser, overcome with remorse for the wrong he has done Elizabeth, staggers from the hall.

In the Third Act we find Elizabeth (attended by Wolfram) absorbed in prayer at the foot of a wayside cross. She awaits the return of the pilgrims from Rome; the chant is heard, and the train crosses the stage, but Tannhäuser is not among them. Elizabeth, after an impassioned prayer to heaven for her own death and her lover's salvation, returns to the castle, indicating by a sign to Wolfram that they will meet in heaven. The shadows of night deepen, and Tannhäuser in the garb of a pilgrim enters, and inquires the way to the Venusberg. He and Wolfram recognise each other, and at Wolfram's entreaty Tannhäuser relates how he had made his way to Rome, and confessed his sin to the Pope, only to be met by the declaration that his sin was beyond pardon, and that the dry staff in the hand of the Pope would as soon bud and blossom as Tannhäuser might hope for salvation. He will therefore rejoin Venus, since earth and heaven are alike closed to him. The music of the Venusberg revels is heard, and the back of the stage opens to show Venus, who by enticing gestures would attract Tannhäuser to her arms. Wolfram endeavours by force to withhold him, and finally assures him that Elizabeth, dying for his sake, will win his pardon. Tannhäuser cries upon her name, and the Venusberg vanishes. The sound of a funeral hymn is heard, and a torchlight procession bearing the body of the princess enters; Tannhäuser throws himself beside the bier and expires, with a prayer for Elizabeth's intercession upon his lips. A group of youthful pilgrims enter bearing the Pope's staff, which has miraculously burst into leaf and flower, and the sun rises upon the assurance of Tannhäuser's salvation.

Introductory remarks—The Venusberg—Tannhäuser—His works—Parallel with Thomas the Rhymer—Hörselberg=Ercildoune—Holda—Hermann of Thuringia—The *Wart-*

burg-krieg—Character of the poem—Antiquity of riddling contests—Heinrich von Osterdingen—Wolfram von Eschenbach—Walther von der Vogelweide—Reimar von Zweter—Der Schreiber—Biterolf—Elizabeth of Hungary—Tannhäuser's pilgrimage—Pope Urban IV.—The legend of the staff—Der treue Eckhart—Original significance of Tannhäuser's transgression.

THIS, the last drama the legendary sources of which we propose to discuss, although it cannot, as a whole, be reckoned one of the master's greatest achievements, yet possesses certain characteristics which, taken separately, seem to entitle it to a higher rank among Wagner's works than is usually assigned to it. In purely human interest it is second to none save *Tristan*: and as a specimen of Wagner's dramatic skill it may very properly be classed with the *Parsifal*—perhaps, indeed, it affords even a better opportunity of gauging his power of dramatic construction.

It will probably be readily conceded that in the Tannhäuser drama Wagner owes less to his predecessors than he does elsewhere: no great literary genius had occupied the ground before him and left an indelible impress on the characters of the story; nor was the story itself complete in its parts and definite in its aim. The materials with which he dealt, a ballad of the folk, a poem of the thirteenth century, were absolutely unconnected with each other; to ordinary minds the idea of constructing a strong

and effective drama out of the Tannhäuser legend, popular though it was, and the little-known and hopelessly confusing *Wartburg-krieg*, would have seemed impracticable enough. It was the insight of genius which revealed to Wagner the dramatic possibilities underlying the identification of the hero of the legend with one of the characters of the poem, and turned the unreliable hypothesis of a (much-astray) scholar to such happy account.

The story of Tannhäuser, as it stands in the drama, is Wagner's own, and, though musically it must be held inferior to the later works, being of all Wagner's dramas the only one which at times perilously approaches the commonplace, yet in dramatic interest and construction it can hold its own with any of them, and is certainly the one for which Wagner may throughout fairly claim undivided credit.

At the opening of the drama we find ourselves surrounded by the bewildering enchantments of the Venusberg, which here has an indisputable right to that name. With great skill Wagner has separated the mingled elements of Latin and Teutonic fancy, which, as we have attempted in our previous chapter to show, combined to make up the curious myth in question; Venus here is Venus Verticordia, and no longer Freya or Holda.

We therefore find that all the surroundings and

characteristics of the scene are purely classical: nymphs, mænads, satyrs throng the stage in wild confusion; cupids discharge their deadly arrows; the siren's song is heard in the distance; while, at the command of the three Graces, scenes illustrative of the loves of the classic gods fill the background. A poem of the later half of the fifteenth century, by Hermann von Sachsenheim, represents Venus as appearing attended by three princesses, clad like her in scarlet robes,[1] and it is possible that this may have suggested to Wagner the idea of making the three Graces practically 'rulers of the revels' at Venus' court; but the connection is otherwise natural enough.

The drama does not specifically state the duration of Tannhäuser's residence in the lower-world, nor are the various versions of the legend at one upon this point; the period is variously represented as half a year, one year, or two years,—the second of these appears to agree best with the indications of the drama. From analogy with other legends the mystic period generally assigned to the dwelling of a mortal in the other-world would seem to be *seven* years, and this is the time mentioned in the legend of Thomas the Rhymer, with which, as we shall presently see, that of Tannhäuser possesses important points of contact.

[1] A full account of the contents of this poem will be found in Alexandra von Schleinitz' *Tannhäuser*, p. 150.

But, whatever the length of time spent by the knight in this palace of delights, we find in all the versions that he becomes satiated with the merely carnal pleasures surrounding him, and ardently desirous of returning to the purer atmosphere of the mortal world; while Venus, on her part, is equally desirous of retaining him as her consort. One curious feature in the story is that, throughout, Tannhäuser appears to be the only mortal thus decoyed; otherwise the companions of Venus are purely mythological figures. One would think that other knights before him must have been taken in the toils of the enchantress; that if the castle of Klingsor in the *Parzival*, and of his nameless counterpart in *Li Conte del Graal*, are crowded with knightly victims to the magician's spells, the courts of Venus, too, must have known many such dwellers; but this is not the case—the testimony to a victim other than Tannhäuser is but scanty. How came it to pass, then, that tradition has selected this man in particular—no fictitious character, be it remembered—for such a fate? A Minnesinger of the later half of the thirteenth century, Tannhäuser does not appear, from the specimens of his work which we possess, to have been a poet of the first rank; his verses are marred by the constant interpolation of foreign words, and lists of names, geographical and literary. In Paul's monumental

Grundriss der deutschen Philologie, Tannhäuser's style is described as a mixture of the courtly and the popular, a '*kuriose manier*.' The personal character indicated by his poems is that of a man of emphatically 'gay' disposition, fond of the society of women, and involved in numerous love-affairs. If the impressive poem known as 'Tannhäuser's Buss-lied' be really his, it shows that later years brought deep repentance for the sins and follies of his youth; but on this point there exists a difference of opinion. It remains a question whether the legend, certainly connected at an early date with the name of the poet, gave occasion to the poem; or whether the existence of the poem, in connection with Tannhäuser's other writings, led to the legend being definitely attached to him. In any case, so far as we may judge from internal evidence, Tannhäuser was a very fit subject for such an experience. The fact, touched upon in the previous chapter, that the Pope who figures in every version of the story was in truth a contemporary of the poet, goes to show that the legend was attached to their names before there was time for the dates to become confused.

And here we are confronted with a very curious literary coincidence: a story, in its essence practically identical, is told of another poet, contemporary with Tannhäuser, but a native of

another country. The majority of the readers of this study are probably familiar with the name of Thomas the Rhymer, and with at least the outline of his story, but they may not have realised the fact that he, too, lived at the end of the thirteenth century, and that his fate was really identical with that of the German Minnesinger. Decoyed by the elfin queen to her underground dwelling, Thomas remains with her for seven years (a period also assigned by a Flemish version of the legend to Tannhäuser's stay), and is then permitted to return to earth, but is bound to rejoin his mistress whenever she shall send for him. She eventually summons him by the apparition of a hart and hind, and, much against his will, Thomas follows the mysterious messengers and is never seen again.[1]

It may be objected that there is a wide difference between the idea commonly attached to Venus in the Tannhäuser legend, and that connected with the elfin or faery queen of the Scotch tradition; but the difference is less than at first appears. Writers on the subject have before now remarked that the fairies of Scotch folk-lore are, as a rule, far more sinister and pagan in char-

[1] In Northern mythology a stag is constantly symbol and messenger of the under-world. It is through following a white stag that in the *Chevalier au Cygne* King Oriant meets Beatrix, who, as we have seen, is distinctly of unearthly origin.

acter than are their English *confrères*,[1] and the old ballad of Thomas the Rhymer shows clearly that the queen of the poet's love was no holy influence.

> 'It was mirk, mirk night, and there was nae starn light,
> And they waded through red blude to the knee,
> For a' the blude that's shed on earth
> Rins through the springs of that countrie.'

Simrock remarks that the name of Thomas' dwelling, Ercildoune = Hörselberg, the original name of Tannhäuser's underground home, and, without entering into details, remarks that the two stories are the same. If the identification of the names be correct (a point not to be settled by an amateur), it points clearly to a period of contact prior to the Tannhäuser legend, after which the name of Venusberg replaces the older appellation; and, in its present literary form, the Scotch story is decidedly the elder of the two, all the Tannhäuser ballads being comparatively late in date.

It is a curious fact, in this connection, that German chroniclers relate that an English queen, Reinswiga, after the death of her husband, had a vision in which it was revealed to her that his soul was detained in purgatorial fires within the Hôrselberg in Thuringia. Thither the queen accordingly journeyed, and, founding a convent near the mysterious hill, devoted her life to prayer for her

[1] Cf. *Scottish Fairy and Folk Tales*, edited by Sir George Douglas. Introduction, p. xvii.

husband's soul. Grässe[1] considers that the tradition of the Hörselberg being the home of departed souls thus had its origin in England. It certainly seems clear that there *is* a connection between our island and Germany with regard to this Tannhäuser legend the full extent and bearing of which has not hitherto been worked out; to explain the resemblance between the two contemporary stories merely by reference to the common root of a visit to the under-world, and the union of a mortal with a being of supernatural origin (as Baring-Gould does in his *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*), is obviously insufficient. It is much to be desired that some expert in folk-lore questions should fully investigate what at present remains an interesting problem.

In the drama Tannhäuser's invocation of the Blessed Virgin brings about the immediate disappearance of Venus and all her court and his sudden restoration to the upper-world, a transformation which does not take place in the legend, although there, as in the drama, it is the invocation which causes his release and determines Venus to yield to his request. But in the ballad Venus's declaration that Tannhäuser shall sing

[1] Cf. Grässe, *Der Tannhäuser und Ewige Jude*, p. 2. In the absence of date, name of husband, etc., it is difficult to identify Reinswiga, but the end of the seventh century in England witnessed many such renunciations of royal status, and pilgrimages for the welfare of the soul.

her praises wherever he may wander (which Wagner later on turns to such fine dramatic use) follows *after* he has invoked the aid of the Virgin, and received his dismissal from the indignant goddess.

Following immediately on the disappearance of the Venusberg, Wagner has introduced an episode the full beauty and significance of which is, in all probability, often overlooked. By the introduction of the shepherd boy and his charming spring song, the connection, already pointed out, between Venus and Holda is preserved; and in this picture of the gracious nature-goddess awaking by her touch the earth from her winter sleep we have, as it were, an intermediate stage between the pagan revels of the court of Venus and the devout solemnity of the pilgrim's chant. To pass from the one to the other without such an intermediate stage would have been too sudden a transition, but with the shepherd lad we feel no jarring inconsistency between this recognition of nature's work, albeit somewhat personified, and the acknowledgment of nature's God.

With the entrance of the Landgrave and his knights we leave the Tannhäuser legend proper, and take up the second of the two main threads which Wagner has so deftly intertwined. We may indeed say that we leave the province of legend for that of history, since the characters who now

enter upon the scene are each and all real historical personalities.

Landgrave Hermann of Thuringia, and his court at the Wartburg which drew to itself, as if by a magnet, all the poetical, which is practically synonymous with all the literary, life of the day, is one of the great facts of mediæval German history. It is strange to find, in a period outwardly so rough and rude, when Germany was racked by internal dissensions, and the whole of Christendom periodically convulsed with the agonies of a fresh crusade, with its inevitable characteristics of fatuous mismanagement, resulting in horrible waste of life and reckless expenditure of capital, not merely the germ, but the full flower, of a life so different in its aims and energies, a life the real value of which we are only now learning to rightly estimate. Whether, apart from his literary tastes, and the generosity which led him to encourage and yield full recognition to the genius of others, Hermann would have had any special claims to the notice of posterity may perhaps be doubted. As Landgrave of Thuringia he certainly occupied an important position, and his adherence or opposition was an important factor in determining the success or failure of the rival candidates for the imperial crown. His personal character, too, seems to have stood high with his contemporaries; but, nevertheless, the part he took in the

political life of his times stands second to the commanding position which he occupies in the history of literature; we know that some of the most important works of the period, such as the *Æneid* of Heinrich von Veldeck and the *Willehalm* of von Eschenbach owe their existence directly to his action.

The fame of the Landgrave Hermann and his court has been celebrated in a poem, or succession of poems, of the thirteenth century known as the *Wartburg-krieg*; and it is this poem, founded on no special historical incident, but rather reminiscent of the general tenor of life at Hermann's court, which has given Wagner the idea for the contest in the Second Act of his drama, and supplied him with the names of the singers taking part in it.

So far as the subject-matter of the poem itself is concerned it has contributed nothing towards the drama.

It is doubtful whether we possess the *Wartburg-krieg* in a complete form; as we know it, it is apparently a collection of fragments more or less closely connected with each other. Simrock divides it into seven parts, and considers that the earliest section was composed about the year 1233, though certain stanzas which may very well be the genuine work of Walther von der Vogelweide, and as such would date about 1216, have been incor

porated in the later portions. The last addition to the poem he dates about 1287, but, as a matter of fact, the *Wartburg-krieg* both as regards structure and meaning remains, more or less, a literary problem.[1]

The first part of the poem, as we know it, deals with a contest between the knights as to the respective merits of certain princes: Heinrich von Ofterdingen, as challenger, maintaining the superiority of the Duke of Austria over any three princes that can be named; the other singers, represented principally by der Schreiber and Walther von der Vogelweide, agreeing eventually in declaring Hermann of Thuringia superior to all his contemporaries. Biterolf and Reimar von Zweter take a less prominent part in the contest, and Wolfram von Eschenbach is called in to act as umpire. Von Ofterdingen, who has staked his head on the issue, is defeated through a ruse of Walther's, and calls on Klingsor of Hungary to aid him by his magic skill; the second part of the poem is devoted to the 'riddling' contest between Klingsor and Wolfram, in which the Christian faith of the knight proves too powerful for the magician and the spirits whom he summons to his aid.

The remaining portions are somewhat loosely connected with the main idea of the 'krieg,' one

[1] Cf. *Der Wartburg-krieg*, herausgegeben von Karl Simrock (1858).

part being taken up by an energetic attack on the ecclesiastical abuses rife at the time; and another section devoted to a lament over the death both of the Landgrave Hermann and the Graf von Hennenberg.

Simrock is inclined to consider the second part as the real kernel of the poem; certainly such riddling contests as we here find depicted are of great antiquity, and, as we saw in chapter v., the penalty of failure in such a trial of skill was often loss of life. It seems somewhat inadequate to find the punishment of death attached to failure in such a dispute as the first part of the *Wartburg-krieg* recounts; nor does there seem to be any attempt to inflict such punishment on the defeated knight—the whole question falls to the ground, and von Ofterdingen himself vanishes from view before the conclusion of the poem.

The authorship of the *Wartburg-krieg* has been a matter of discussion; it bears no name, nor is there any certain tradition definitely proclaiming it the work of any particular poet. It has been surmised, and Simrock concludes, with reason, that it is the work of Heinrich von Ofterdingen; all the other poets represented as taking part are real historical personages (with the exception of Klingsor, who, however, as we have before remarked, was, in the belief of mediæval writers, no less real than his opponent Wolfram), and it seems difficult

to believe that a purely imaginary singer would be introduced as taking a leading part among them. On the other hand, no work by a poet of this name is known to us; the only direct testimony as to his existence connects him with the *Wartburg-krieg*, and is somewhat obscurely worded; but in the opinion of some scholars the writer of the passage, Hermann der Damen, meant to indicate him as the author of, at least, the second part of the poem, that dealing with the contest between Wolfram and Klingsor.

It is true that the poem of the dwarf-king Laurin and the fight in his rose-garden (an offshoot of the great Thidrek-saga) contains a statement to the effect that it is the work of Heinrich von Ofterdingen; but on the one hand the passage occurs at the very end, after the formal conclusion of the poem, and may therefore very well be the addition of a later writer; and on the other, Laurin is mentioned in the *Wartburg-krieg* as being responsible for the disappearance of Dietrich (Thidrek) von Bern, which would suggest the possibility of ascribing the Laurin to the reputed author of the other poem.

An attempt has been made to claim von Ofterdingen as the author of the *Nibelungen-lied*, but no serious basis for such a conjecture exists, and it has been dismissed by most scholars as unworthy of attention. If von Ofterdingen be the author of

the *Wartburg-krieg* he certainly cannot be the author of the *Nibelungen-lied*; and it seems in the highest degree improbable that the name of the author of the great epic of the German people should have survived, not only with nothing to connect with his work, but with a tradition connecting him with a poem of later date and infinitely inferior in literary value; if true, it would certainly be a notable 'curiosity of literature.' In the *Grundriss der deutschen Philologie,* von Ofterdingen is dismissed as 'a poet whose existence has not yet been proved from independent and reliable sources.'

More interesting for our purpose than the question of his works is the hypothesis which identifies this mysterious poet with the Minnesinger Tannhäuser, a theory first propounded by Lucas in 1838. The grounds on which the identification is based are slender in the extreme, and rest mainly on the contention that Tannhäuser was not the proper name of the singer but an appellation signifying 'a dweller in the woods' = an outlaw. Unfortunately the name, though curious, is not otherwise unknown—there were Tannhäusers in Bavaria and also in the Tyrol;[1] and the fact that Lucas goes so far as to identify Tannhäuser with the Piper of Hamelin, whose

[1] It is of course quite possible that the original founder of the family derived his name from his dwelling in the woods, though he need not necessarily have been an outlaw.

origin is certainly purely mythic, will be sufficient proof how much reliance can be placed upon his critical acumen. There is no proof that Tannhäuser was ever at the Wartburg; and the statements in his poems which agree with the *Wartburg-krieg*, and have been advanced as proofs of the identity of the writers, consist of allusions which merely prove that both he and the author of the latter work were familiar with the poems of Wolfram von Eschenbach—a statement which might safely be postulated of any poet of the period.

But however unreliable the hypothesis may be in fact, for dramatic purposes it was invaluable; and it cannot be denied that to it Wagner owes the very being of his drama, though, as we have said before, no one but a genius would have seen the capabilities involved in the identification.

Of the other characters, in the drama as in the poem, Wolfram von Eschenbach plays, and rightly, the most important part. As the author of the *Parzival*, and one of the first relators of the Lohengrin legend, Wolfram has already been frequently mentioned in these pages; how high a position he held in the estimation of his fellow-countrymen is proved, not merely by the number of MSS. still existing of his principal work, and the numerous allusions to it in contemporary literature, but even more strikingly by the *rôle* assigned to him in the *Wartburg-krieg*, where he is not merely the leading

poet, but also the champion and representative of the Christian faith. And posterity has practically indorsed the verdict of mediæval times; both as epic and as Christian poet Wolfram von Eschenbach ranks with the greatest names of German literature, and his *Parzival* is held by many critics to be the finest outcome of mediæval thought and fancy previous to the immortal *Divina Commedia.*

Of the details of the poet's life we know very little; the dates of birth and death are alike uncertain, but they probably fall within the years 1170-1220. We know that he was of knightly birth, a native of Ober-Eschenbach in Bavaria (where he was buried, though his tomb is no longer to be seen), and that he paid more than one visit to the court of the Wartburg. His works consist of *Parzival*; *Willehalm,* also an epic poem, dealing with the feats of William of Orange and his struggle against the Saracens; *Titurel,* which may have been intended either for an introduction or an explanatory addition to the *Parzival,* and is evidently drawn from the same source as that poem; and sundry songs, Tage- or Wachterlieder. A very curious proof of the popularity of Wolfram's works has already been referred to, viz. the fact that Klingsor, the enchanter of the *Parzival,* became in popular fancy a real personage, and as such, in the *Wartburg-krieg,* contends

on equal terms with Wolfram himself. Strictly speaking, it appears that the Klingsor of the later poem is intended to be a grandson of the original magician (so he states in the *Lohengrin*, which has for introduction part of the 'riddling' contest of the *Wartburg-krieg*); but this is evidently a concession to dates, Wolfram relating the events of the *Parzival* as already in the past, and there is no doubt that, practically, Klingsor was held to be one with the owner of the Château-Merveil.

Wolfram's character in the drama, though undoubtedly attractive, scarcely does justice to the poet as we know him through the curious bits of self-revelation which abound in his works. It is somewhat lacking in force and virility; there is too much of the *poet* (and that not the poet of the *Parzival*) and not enough of the *man*. Wolfram, as he plainly asserts, was a knight before he was a poet, and held his skill in song of but slight account in comparison with his feats of arms, nor was he one to cherish an unrequited affection for any lady, even an Elizabeth,—

> 'If she be not fair for me,
> What care I how fair she be?'

would probably have represented his sentiments more correctly than the words Wagner has put into his lips. Nevertheless, the fact that Wolfram consistently upholds the sanctity of the marriage bond, and the superiority of lawful wedded love,

as compared with the unlawful passion sanctioned by the customs of Minnedienst, pointed him out, above all the poets of his time, as the fitting opponent of Tannhäuser in the changed conditions under which Wagner represents the Sängerkrieg.

The part assigned to Walther von der Vogelweide in the drama is of less importance than his position either in literature or in the Wartburg poem would indicate. He certainly shares with Wolfram the honour of being the most popular poet of his day, and outside his own country his name is probably the more familiar of the two. It was as a lyric poet that Walther excelled; he has left behind him no great epic such as the *Parzival*, but his poems are far more easy reading than are Wolfram's, the style is less involved, and he is peculiarly happy in his management of rhyme and metre.

Walther possessed strong patriotic feelings, and took an ardent interest in the political affairs of his time, which indeed affected him nearly, as for many years he led a wandering life, passing from court to court, and naturally sharing in the vicissitudes which attended the fortunes of his patrons. There has been some debate as to the real nationality of the poet, and it now seems most probable that he was of Tyrolese birth, but the exact dates of his birth and death are as uncertain as in the case of Wolfram. The two

appear to have been closely contemporary in age, but Walther seems to have had the longer life, as we find him singing of the Crusade, 1227-28, in which the Emperor Frederic II. took part, and it is possible that the poet accompanied him to the Holy Land.

We know certainly that Walther possessed an estate near to Würzburg, and that he was buried in the cloisters of the Neu-Münster in that town. Longfellow's lines have made us all familiar with the charming legend of his bequest to the birds who were to be fed daily on his tomb. Alas! the tomb has now vanished, and the only trace of the poet's resting-place is a slab let into the outer wall of the church, bearing two inscriptions, in Latin and in German, the latter by King Ludwig I. of Bavaria, a bas-relief above the inscriptions commemorating the traditional bequest.

Of the other figures of the drama, Reimar von Zweter, who plays the most subordinate part, was in reality far the most famous. A younger contemporary of Walther, to whose genius he is held to have owed much, his poems are remarkable for their high moral tone. The metre in which the majority of his best-accredited verses are composed[1] is known as 'froun êren tôn'; he himself was known as 'Der Ehrenbote.' Of 'Der Schreiber,' who appears to have been an official

[1] Cf. *Grundriss der deutschen Philologie*, vol. ii. p. 340.

of the Landgrave's court, we possess a few Minnelieder. The existence of Biterolf is assured by independent testimony, but there is some doubt as to his works,—whether he is identical with a certain Biterolf, mentioned by Rudolf von Ems as the composer of an 'Alexander,' or whether it was he who was the author of section v. of the *Wartburg-krieg*, the lament for the Landgrave Hermann and the Graf von Hennenberg, the latter having admitted Biterolf to knighthood.[1]

But whence did Wagner derive his suggestion for the central figure of this Second Act, the pure and gracious maiden Elizabeth? On the whole, perhaps, the most winning of all Wagner's heroines, she belongs neither to the Tannhäuser legend nor to the *Wartburg-krieg*. There is no doubt that in Wagner's conception of this character he was influenced by the popular traditions relative to the Landgrave's daughter-in-law, the saintly Elizabeth of Hungary, one of the most touching figures alike in history or legend. Most readers will be familiar with the outlines of Elizabeth's story: her child-betrothal and early marriage to the young Ludwig, Hermann's eldest son; her upbringing at the court of the Wartburg; the influence which by her saintly character she obtained over her

[1] The poem of *Biterolf* is of much earlier date, and connected, like the Laurin, with the Thidrek-saga. Biterolf is the name of the hero of the poem; the authorship is unknown.

young husband, leading him to adopt with her a mode of life better suited to a monk and nun than to a ruling prince and princess; Ludwig's early death; and the cruel harshness with which his brother Heinrich treated the widow. Kingsley's *Saint's Tragedy* gives a striking, and on the whole correct, picture of the events of Elizabeth's life. Probably the highest praise which we can give to Wagner's heroine is that she does no injustice to her famous prototype.

There is, perhaps, in the *Wartburg-krieg*, a suggestion of the great concluding scene of the Second Act, when Heinrich von Ofterdingen, in fear for his life, seeks shelter under the mantle of the Landgravine; but it is a mere hint, and the credit of the scene, as of so much in the Tannhäuser drama, belongs to Wagner alone.

The hero's pilgrimage to Rome and his vain attempt to win absolution from the Pope are found in every version of the legend. In one, a poem in the Weimar Library, the incident of the flowering of the staff is omitted, and the reader is left in doubt as to Tannhäuser's ultimate fate; as a rule the action of the Pope is made the occasion for an attack on the ecclesiastical polity of the day, and the view of the writers apparently is that Tannhäuser's residence in the Venusberg is to be regarded as a temporal punishment, to be terminated at the Last Day, when the Pope will

be finally condemned for his hardness of heart. As we have said before, the Pope is invariably Urban IV., not one of the most famous Pontiffs, though one enactment of his, viz. the institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi, to be held on the Thursday following Trinity Sunday, survives in full force.

The miracle of the blossoming staff, obviously borrowed in the first instance from the miracle of Aaron's rod, is found elsewhere in mediæval legend—notably in connection with the marriage of the Blessed Virgin, and is thus immortalised in Raphael's famous 'Sposalizio' in the Brera at Milan. But the legend is told with more touching effect when, as in the case of Tannhäuser, the rod is the symbol, not of divine election, but of divine pardon. In connection with this, Grässe remarks on the peculiarity of the Pope's having in his hand such a staff as the legend describes, and recalls a tradition to the effect that, during the lifetime of S. Peter, a certain Bavarian bishop appealed to him to recall a dead person to life. S. Peter, unable to go himself, gave the bishop his staff, directing him to lay it upon the corpse, which was thereupon restored to life. Since that time, says the legend, the Pope has possessed no staff.[1]

[1] Cf. Grässe, *Tannhäuser*, p. 28. Visitors to Cologne will probably remember that S. Peter's staff is shown in the Treasury of the Cathedral.

There is but little in the Third Act of the drama, saving Tannhäuser's recital, which can be referred to legendary sources. Elizabeth, with her sorrow and her intercession, stands, as we have seen, outside the real story; but there is one feature of the legend which, though not directly referred to, probably went far to determine the part played by Wolfram in the concluding scenes.

In all the Tannhäuser ballads we find reference to an old and grey-haired knight, who sits without the Venusberg warning off all travellers from its dangerous precincts. This knight is known as 'der treue Eckhart' or Eckewart, and the origin of the character, which certainly in the first instance did not belong to the Tannhäuser legend, has been referred to the *Nibelungenlied*, where Eckewart guards the borders of the Markgraf Rüdiger's land (Book xxvi. lines 1631 *et seq.*). But we can trace it further back; in the Thidrek-saga the knight who has charge of the two Harlungen princes, nephews to king Ermenrich, is named 'der getreue Eckhardt,' and he does his best to defend his young charges against the treachery of their uncle, to which they eventually fall victims. Rassmann remarks (vol. ii. p. 581) that Eckhardt is 'eine sehr bedeutende Sagengestalt,' and it is quite possible that the real origin of the character lies far back and finds its roots

rather in myth than in literature. That Eckhart came into the *Nibelungen-lied* through the Thidrek-saga is most probable, but the connection with the Venusberg seems to have more direct reference to the mythic root of the character, and is probably to be accounted for in some other manner. One of Eckhart's offices is to precede, staff in hand, the train of the Wild Huntsman, and to warn unwary travellers off the road. The appellation 'der treue' may very likely be derived from the Thidrek-saga, where Eckhardt stands in opposition to Sibich or Sifka, 'der ungetreue,' councillor to King Ermenrich. Wolfram, using every effort to prevent Tannhäuser from yielding to the fatal fascinations of the Venusberg, may not unreasonably be held to represent the faithful watcher and warner of the original legend.

The conclusion of the drama differs widely from the legend, in the fact that not only does Tannhäuser *not* return to the Venusberg, but his forgiveness becomes a certainty, a completed fact, instead of at most a probability. This difference is not only in itself more in consonance with modern ideas, but also is partly due to the different view which, as a whole, the drama presents of Tannhäuser's transgression. We must recollect that to mediæval minds the sin of Tannhäuser was not so much the sin of impurity, as at first sight

we should probably decide, but that of apostasy of the most flagrant type, a transgression for which the stern orthodoxy of the Middle Ages could find no forgiveness. The Emperor Julian has been sent down to posterity branded as the 'Apostate' for an infinitely smaller sin; the Christianity he rejected was at its best Arianism, and the faith he accepted Neo-platonism. It was because Venus was what she was, not merely a beautiful woman, but the representative of a power essentially antagonistic to Christianity and its Founder, that dealings with her assumed so terrible an aspect. For a lapse from virtue, which was as much a sin against man as against God, Tannhäuser might have won absolution from man; for a relapse into Paganism, and denial of the Christian faith, the representative of that faith upon earth could hardly have absolved him—it was a case for a higher Tribunal, and the real, not the vicarious, Head of the Church was alone qualified to pronounce sentence. It seems probable that the earliest tellers of the story, who omitted the miracle of the staff, and did not criticise the Pope's action, had a more complete understanding of the real nature of the case than had their successors.

But in the drama it is the other, the human, side of the knight's transgression which is dwelt upon; the contrast which is drawn throughout between the lower and the higher forms of love

between the carnal and the spiritual, effectually fixes our attention on the ethical side of the question, and it would be out of keeping with the prominence given to Tannhäuser's repentance, and Elizabeth's prayers, if the knight's final salvation were left a matter of doubt. In each instance the conclusion of the story is inevitably determined by the point of view of the narrator.

With the Tannhäuser our series of studies on the legends of the Wagner drama may very properly close; it is true that the *Fliegende Holländer* is also based on legendary sources, but the legend is practically without literary form, and the object of these papers has been to draw attention not to the legends alone, but to the literature in which they are enshrined. As to the claims of that literature, as compared with the dramas, opinions will differ—to some minds the figures of these old romances are but shadowy phantoms, or even as the dry bones to which Wagner has given life and movement and human interest. To others the heroes of these old tales are intensely living realities, and it is in a spirit of jealousy for their honour that they approach the Wagner drama; for even as Wagner is the interpreter of his nation's genius, so with all admiration for his many-

sided powers, they can only yield unstinted praise when that genius is clothed in a form, and speaks with a tongue, fully representative, and in all respects worthy, of the pre-Wagner conception.

APPENDIX TO TANNHÄUSER

With reference to the resemblance between the legends of Tannhäuser and Thomas the Rhymer, it is interesting to note that Celtic literature offers some striking parallels. Mr. Nutt, in his essay on 'The Happy Other-World,'[1] points out that the amorous queen who decoys a mortal into her other-world dwelling is a frequent figure in Irish legend. The story of Connla (*Echtra Condla*), given in the essay above referred to, presents several points of contact with the legend of Thomas the Rhymer. Connla, being with his father on the top of Usnech, is accosted by a strange damsel, who invites him to accompany her to her dwelling within the hill, where there is 'neither death, nor sin, nor transgression.' Connla's father orders the Druids to chant against the maiden, when she departs, but leaves Connla an apple (even as the elfin queen gives an apple to Thomas), on which he feeds for a month, and it is whole at the end of the time. At the expiration of the month the maiden returns, and carries off Connla to a land 'in which there is no race save only women and maidens'; and the hero is seen no more. In the same way it is at the invitation of a woman, bearing a branch from which proceeds sweet music, that Bran the son of Febal sets forth in search of the land of the living. The woman is apparently the queen of the 'island of women' to which he comes in the course of his journey; and there is little doubt that this 'island of women,' which forms part of the old Irish paradise, is closely akin to the mystical 'Castle of Maidens,' or Château Merveil, of the Grail legends.

I would here like to draw attention to an interesting article by M. Gaston Paris, *Le Paradis de la reine Sibylle* (Révue de Paris), which shows that the belief in a subterranean land of joy ruled over by a queen of surpassing beauty was current in mediæval Italy. M. Paris hints at possible derivation of the German legend from Italy. In the case of a legend so widely diffused, and having its roots in remote Celtic antiquity, it would seem almost impossible to determine the exact relation to each other of the various versions.

[1] *The Voyage of Bran*, by Kuno Meyer and Alfred Nutt.

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